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THE CAVE OF ILLUSION

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SECOND EDITION

Aglavaine and Selysette

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

BY

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Translated by

ALFRED SUTRO

With an Introduction by

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The Cave of Illusion

A Play in Four Acts

By

Alfred Sutro

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Maurice Maeterlinck

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P R E F A C E

La pièce qu'on va lire appartient à un genre ingrat et difficile, mais il semble bien que ce genre soit aujourd'hui le moins artificiel, le plus vivant, le plus sincère, et qui sait ? le seul qui réponde à toutes les réalités, et surtout aux plus hautes, de notre vie. L'expérience nous montre qu'il n'est plus possible de faire de bonnes tragédies. Parcourez toute la littérature de la seconde moitié de ce siècle, vous n'en trouverez probablement qu'une qui ne tombera pas dans l'oubli, c'est l'Atalanta in Calydon de Swinburne. Il est vrai que c'est moins une tragédie qu'un grand poème lyrique dialogué. D'autre part, la pièce poétique, qu'elle se présente sous forme de drame romantique ou de fantaisie lyrique, se fait extrêmement rare. Depuis la période romantique anglaise et française, si je mets à part les poèmes de Wagner qui n'appartiennent pas à la littérature proprement dite, mais à la musique—quelle est la pièce poétique qui ait réellement vécu, qui nous ait révélé dans les actions et les passions des hommes une beauté, une grandeur ou un charme lyrique

inconnus ? Quelle est celle qui ait marqué dans l'histoire littéraire, qui ait eu une influence durable et dont on se souvienne ? Si l'on m'interrogeait sérieusement sur ce point je ne pourrais guère citer que "Pippa Passes" de Browning, et encore faudrait-il dire que ce poème ne demeure poème tout en étant neuf, réel et actuel, que parce qu'il n'est pas à proprement parler une pièce de théâtre, attendu qu'il est probablement impossible de le porter sur la scène.

La poésie est-elle morte ? Loin de là, je suis persuadé que la littérature du monde civilisé, et surtout celle de l'Angleterre, a compté dans la dernière période de ce siècle, plus de poètes de premier ordre qu'elle n'en compta jamais, la période Elisabethéenne exceptée. Mais la poésie au sens habituel du terme, ce que nous entendons spécialement par ce mot "poésie" quand nous le prononçons en nous mêmes : la beauté verbale, la transfiguration des êtres et des choses, l'agrandissement surhumain et un peu arbitraire des passions, des actions et des sentiments des hommes, l'humanisation de la nature, &c., la poésie proprement dite, s'est éloignée du théâtre. J'ai donné ailleurs les raisons qui me paraissent expliquer cet éloignement ; et il serait trop long de les reproduire ici. Au fond, il n'y en a peut-être qu'une : c'est que l'esprit humain subit depuis trois quarts de siècle une évolution dont on ne se rend pas

encore un compte bien exact, mais qui est probablement l'évolution la plus considérable qui ait jamais eu lieu dans le domaine de la pensée. Cette évolution, si elle ne nous a pas encore donné sur la matière, la vie, la destinée de l'homme, le but, l'origine et les lois de l'univers, des certitudes définitives, nous a du moins enlevé ou rendu presque impraticables un certain nombre d'incertitudes, et ces incertitudes étaient précisément celles où se complaisaient et où fleurissaient librement les pensées les plus hautes. Elles étaient, par excellence, l'élément de beauté et de grandeur de toutes nos allusions, la force mystérieuse qui élevait nos paroles audessus des paroles de la vie ordinaire, et le poète semblait grand et profond, à proportion de la forme plus ou moins triomphante, de la place plus ou moins prépondérante qu'il savait donner à ces incertitudes belles ou effrayantes, pacifiques ou hostiles, tragiques ou consolatrices.

La haute poésie, à la regarder de près, se compose de trois éléments principaux : D'abord la beauté verbale, ensuite la contemplation et la peinture passionnée de ce qui existe réellement au dehors ou au dedans de nous, c'est-à-dire la nature et nos sentiments, et enfin, enveloppant l'œuvre entière et créant son atmosphère particulière, l'idée que le poète se fait de l'inconnu dans lequel flottent les êtres et les choses qu'il évoque, du

mystère qui domine et juge ces êtres et ces choses et préside à leurs destinées. Il ne me paraît pas douteux què ce dernier élément est le plus important. Voyez un beau poème, si bref, si rapide qu'il soit. Il est très rare que sa beauté, sa grandeur soit purement extérieure et limitée aux choses connues de notre monde. Neuf fois sur dix il les doit à une allusion aux mystères des destinées humaines, à quelque lien nouveau du visible à l'invisible, du temporel à l'éternel. Or, si l'évolution peut-être sans précédent qui se produit de nos jours dans l'idée que nous nous faisons de l'inconnu, ne trouble pas le poète lyrique et ne lui enlève rien, il n'en va pas de même pour le poète dramatique. Il est parfaitement permis au poète lyrique de demeurer un simple théoricien de l'inconnu. Il peut s'en tenir aux idées générales les plus vastes et les plus imprécises. Il n'a pas à se préoccuper de leurs conséquences pratiques. S'il est convaincu que les divinités d'autrefois, que la justice ou la fatalité ne se mêlent plus aux actions des hommes et ne dirigent plus la marche de ce monde, il n'a pas besoin de donner un nom aux forces mystérieuses qui interviennent toujours dans notre vie et dirigent toute chose. Que ce soit Dieu ou l'univers qui lui paraisse vaste et terrible, peu importe, nous lui demandons seulement qu'il fasse passer en nous l'impression vaste ou terrible qu'il a ressentie. Mais le poète

dramatique ne peut pas s'en tenir à ces généralités. Il est obligé de faire descendre dans la vie réelle, dans la vie de tous les jours, l'idée qu'il se fait de l'inconnu. Il faut qu'il devienne en quelque sorte le praticien du mystère. Il faut qu'il nous montre de quelle façon, sous quelle forme, dans quelles conditions, d'après quelles lois agissent sur nos destinées les puissances supérieures, les influences inintelligibles, les lois profondes, dont, en tant que poète, il est persuadé que l'univers est rempli. Et comme il est arrivé à un moment où loyalement il lui est à peu près impossible d'admettre les anciennes, et où celles qui les doivent remplacer ne sont pas encore fixées, n'ont pas encore de nom, ne sont pas encore visibles, il hésite, tâtonne et n'ose pas sortir du refuge de la poésie lyrique.

Il arrive néanmoins qu'il tente et qu'il réussisse une de ces sorties périlleuses, car la haute poésie est avant tout le royaume de l'imprévu, et des règles les plus générales surgissent,—comme des fragments d'étoiles qui traversent un ciel où l'on n'attendait aucune lueur—des exceptions déconcertantes. Et c'est alors La Puissance des Ténèbres de Tolstoï qui passe sur le fleuve le plus banal de la vie inférieure, comme un îlot flottant, un îlot d'horreur grandiose et tout ensanglanté de fumées infernales, mais enveloppé aussi de l'énorme

flamme blanche, pure et miraculeuse qui jaillit de l'âme primitive d'Akim. Ou bien, ce sout les Revenants d'Ibsen, où éclate dans un salon bourgeois, aveuglant, étouffant, affolant les personnages, l'un des plus terribles mystères des destinées humaines. Nous avons beau nous fermer à l'angoisse du mystère, dans ces deux drames interviennent des puissances supérieures incontestables et que tous nous sentons plus ou moins peser sur notre vie. Car c'est bien moins l'action du Dieu des Chrétiens qui nous trouble dans le poème de Tolstoï que l'action du Dieu qui se trouve dans une âme humaine plus simple, plus juste, plus pure et plus grande que les autres ; et dans le poème d'Ibsen c'est l'influence d'une loi de justice ou d'injustice récemment soupçonnée et formidable, la loi de l'hérédité ; loi peut-être discutable, mais si mal connue et en même temps si plausible que son mystère énorme et menaçant cache la plus grande portion de ce qu'on y pourrait mettre en doute. Mais, en dépit de ces éruptions inattendues de l'énigme qu'on croyait endormie, il n'en est pas moins vrai que le mystère, l'inintelligible, le surhumain, l'infini—peu importe le nom qu'on lui donne—est devenu si peu maniable depuis que nous n'admettons plus à priori l'intervention divine dans les actions humaines, que le génie lui-même n'a pas souvent de ces rencontres heureuses. Quand Ibsen, dans d'autres

drames, essaie de relier à d'autres mystères, les gestes de ses hommes en mal de conscience exceptionnelle ou de ses femmes hallucinées, il faut convenir que si l'atmosphère qu'il parvient à créer est étrange et troublante, elle est rarement saine et respirable, parce qu'elle est rarement raisonnable et réelle.

N'en peut-on pas conclure que le génie se heurte ici à quelque chose qui ressemble fort à l'impossible, et que, dans le déssarroi actuel du mystère il ne parvient plus, ne parvient encore qu'exceptionnellement à faire agir sur la scène les puissances souveraines qui existent toujours, qui ont changé d'apparence ou de nom, mais auxquelles, dans la réalité de la vie, nous sommes aussi totalement soumis qu'autrefois ? Dans le temps, le génie à coup sûr et très fréquemment le talent, réussissaient à nous donner au théâtre cet arrière-fond d'éénigme, ce nuage des cimes, ce courant d'infini qui semble nécessaire pour que l'œuvre dramatique soit aussi complète qu'une autre œuvre d'art, et pour l'élever, sinon au niveau, du moins jusqu'à l'atmosphère d'Hamlet, d'Œdipe roi et d'Antigone, ou à la hauteur d'un roman, d'un récit historique ou d'un poème lyrique de premier ordre. Cela ne montre-t-il pas que la forme dramatique est en ce moment la forme littéraire la plus ingrate, la plus déconcertée, et la plus difficile ? Il se peut que cette hésitation et cette difficulté ne soient que passagères

et que s'approche le jour où l'on parviendra à rattacher de nouveau à de grandes lois universelles, les passions et les actions scéniques de l'être humain, mais, en attendant, nous aurions mauvaise grâce à nous plaindre que des poètes excellents ne réalisent pas aujourd'hui ce qu'on semblait réaliser assez facilement autrefois, ou qu'ils échouent là où le génie le plus incontestable a échoué lui-même. Il serait injuste, par exemple, de nous dire, en présence de tragédies bourgeoises du genre de celle qu'on va lire : oui ce sont là d'honorables tentatives. Elles sont intéressantes, profondément humaines. Elles agitent des passions bien réelles, des inquiétudes nécessaires, des pensées salutaires, mais il y manque néanmoins ce que nous demandons à l'œuvre de premier ordre, ce point de vue qu'il faudrait peut-être prendre hors de la vie actuelle, ce je ne sais quoi de dominateur et d'assuré, ce fond ou ce surcroit d'intérêt et de beauté inépuisable auxquels nous ont accoutumés les grands poètes de tous les temps. Il y manque notamment l'intervention de ce troisième personnage, mystérieux, invisible mais partout présent, qu'on pourrait appeler le personnage sublime, qui n'est peut-être autre chose que l'idée inconsciente et inexprimable, mais forte et profonde que le poète se fait de l'univers, et qui donne à la vie un sens fécond et éternel et à l'œuvre une signification et une ampleur qui ne périsseont pas.

Il est vrai que cela y manque, mais cela manque un peu partout. Nous sommes à un moment où nous commençons peut-être à avoir une idée, mais où nous n'avons pas encore un sentiment synthétique auquel nous puissions rattacher les joies et les malheurs de notre existence. On ne s'en aperçoit pas trop dans la vie, car d'ordinaire on s'y contente d'explications instinctives et vagues. On s'en aperçoit moins cruellement dans la littérature générale : romans, histoire, poème, où il est plus facile de nous donner le change par de belles paroles abondantes et indécises. Mais sur la scène où tout se ramasse, se concentre en un instant, s'illumine et se précise, le vide laissé par le départ des dieux et des grandes pensées de justice, d'espérance ou de fatalité est énorme et pénible. Pourtant il est salutaire de le montrer et loyal de ne pas le peupler de fantômes.

Une pièce comme The Cave of Illusion, si les choses y étaient un peu plus poussées à l'extrême, si le personnage principal, au lieu d'être une sorte de demi-raté qui, au fond, ne saurait avoir aucun droit, était par exemple un grand savant sur la voie d'une découverte essentielle, et placé (par des circonstances qui ne sont peut-être pas imaginables) entre son devoir de savant et son devoir d'homme, une pièce, comme The Cave of Illusion, représenterait très exactement la situation du haut théâtre d'aujourd'hui. D'ailleurs, telle qu'elle est, elle n'en

caractérise que mieux ce théâtre, qui, jusqu'ici ne porte pas encore très hardiment les problèmes les plus importants sur les derniers sommets où l'on pourrait tenter de les résoudre une fois pour toutes, ou montrer clairement qu'ils sont insolubles. C'est dire que quand je parle du haut théâtre d'aujourd'hui, je parle plutôt d'une tendance ou d'une possibilité que d'une réalisation satisfaisante. C'est dire aussi que les restrictions que je fais sont d'ordre général, concernent le "genre" plutôt que la pièce en question et ne diminuent en rien la très haute estime où je tiens *The Cave of Illusion*. C'est parce que ce drame me paraît à bien des points de vue le type presque parfait du meilleur drame moderne qu'il permet de généraliser les observations qu'il fait naître. Si j'avais entendu ne m'occuper que de la pièce elle-même et non du moment intéressant qu'elle représente dans l'histoire du théâtre, j'aurais eu peu à critiquer et beaucoup à louer ; entre autres choses, la précision prompte, simple, forte et si naturelle du dialogue où pas une réplique n'est superflue, la vérité, la vie extraordinaire, concentrée et pourtant abondante de la plupart des caractères : les deux femmes, la vieille mère certains comparses, &c., et enfin des scènes comme la visite de Gabrielle à Clara, et celle où la destinée de David et de Gabrielle se décide et se voit tout entière, dans une minute silencieusement tragique, à travers la

fragile transparence d'une porte—fenêtre qu'une main malveillante a refermée sur eux. . . Peu de choses, que je sache, dans notre théâtre actuel sont plus poignantes, plus mesurées, plus précises, plus simplement et plus humainement fortes et douloureuses. . .

Mais pour revenir au “moment” que The Cave of Illusion, avec la plupart des bonnes pièces d'aujourd'hui, représente dans l'évolution du théâtre, qu'y a-t-il au centre de ce drame ? Une question à laquelle on pourrait peut-être très raisonnablement répondre parce qu'elle ne vient pas de la hauteur plus ou moins inaccessible d'où elle aurait pu venir, mais à laquelle, si elle était mieux posée il devrait être à peu près impossible de répondre. C'est là le caractère de nos problèmes moraux supérieurs. Il en est peu que nous soyons à même de resoudre en ce moment, livrés que nous sommes pour l'instant, et depuis trop peu de temps, après une longue et consolante tutelle, à nos propres lumières et à nos propres forces. Or, une question c'est un vide. Autrefois, durant la période classique ou romantique, dans ce vide, ou eût mis un Dieu, une loi surnaturelle, un devoir héroïque mais aveugle, une espérance certaine, une providence incontestée, et, à défaut du reste, la fatalité. Naguère on y eût mis une question à laquelle on aurait répondu d'avance (les questions auxquelles on peut répondre ainsi sont d'ordinaire de très petites

questions) et c'est la pièce à thèse. Plus près de nous encore, on n'y aurait mis ni question ni réponse. On aurait volontairement ignoré les problèmes que l'incident soulève et on se serait borné à masquer le vide inquiétant en accumulant tout autour des propos aussi sceptiques, aussi naturellement vulgaires que possible ; et c'eût été la pièce réaliste proprement dite.

Il est certain qu'il y a ici une évolution très curieuse et un pas vers le mieux. Evidemment, nous sommes enclins à regretter les beaux et grands fantômes qui animaient l'inexplicable. Mais lorsque vient le jour, il ne faut plus songer aux fantômes de la nuit. Ce n'est pas qu'il soit bien certain que nous nous trouvions dans la lumière du jour, ni même que cette lumière approche ; mais enfin nous croyons assez fermement que nous nous y trouvons ou du moins que la nuit n'est plus la même. Dès lors ce que nous avons de mieux à faire, en attendant qu'une autre nuit revienne ou que jaillisse la clarté incontestable, c'est de ne plus nous mêler aux fantômes de la nuit dont nous nous croyons sortis, et surtout de ne plus admettre qu'ils dirigent nos passions, nos sentiments et nos pensées, qu'ils empiètent sur nos droits et nous déchargent de nos grands devoirs. Le mystère n'est pas mort, les puissances supérieures sont éternelles puisqu'elles constituent la vie et la volonté de l'univers et qu'il est impossible de concevoir que l'univers périsse.

Nous croyons savoir qu'elles ne sont pas aux lieux où nous nous imaginions qu'elles résidaient mais nous ne savons pas encore où elles résident ni ce qu'elles veulent. Le plus honnête est donc de ne plus retourner aux lieux où nous sommes persuadés qu'elles ne sont pas, de ne plus leur faire faire ce que nous sommes convaincus qu'elles ne font pas, mais d'aller à leur recherche là où il nous semble que nous avons le plus d'espoir d'en trouver quelque trace, c'est-à-dire en nous-mêmes, avec l'aide des clartés nouvelles que des lois universelles—qui ne sont peut-être pas plus sûres que les anciennes, mais qui pour l'instant nous paraissent plus plausibles—jettent sur notre être moral. Peu importe que nous nous trompions une fois de plus. Ceux qui viendront après nous profiteront de notre erreur pourvu que nous l'ayons aimée d'assez bonne foi pour la pousser jusqu' au bout ; car au bout d'une erreur sincère et désintéressée il y a toujours une vérité utile. C'est la voie honnête où semble s'engager le haut théâtre moral d'aujourd'hui. Il est possible que par d'autres voies on atteigne une beauté plus prompte, plus séduisante ou plus consolante ; il n'en reste pas moins que la beauté la plus belle et la plus salutaire doit être celle dont on s'approche par les voies les plus loyales.

MAURICE MAETERLINCK.



THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

DAVID HOLLESDAILE
MR. MOLYNEUX
GENERAL WILLIAMS
MR. HOPKINSON
GABRIELLE
CLARA HOLLESDAILE
MRS. HOLLESDAILE
MRS. MELLISSENT
LADY PATTERSON
MRS. HOPKINSON
HANNAH
TOPLIS



THE CAVE OF ILLUSION

THE FIRST ACT

The drawing-room in MR. MOLYNEUX's house, abutting on Regent's Park. The apartment is lavishly decorated, but the furniture and appointments bear evidence rather of wealth than taste. There is a door on the right, leading to MRS. MOLYNEUX's boudoir; another on the left, opening into the entrance-hall. At the back there are French windows leading to the garden which surrounds the house. It is an afternoon in June. MR. MOLYNEUX stands by the sofa, with one foot upon it, reading a note. He has just come in, and is still wearing his hat. He is a very fair, youngish man of thirty-eight; clean-shaven, with cold blue eyes and a stony, impassive expression. His voice is pleasant and musical. A FOOTMAN comes in from the hall, ushering GENERAL WILLIAMS, a

tall, handsome old man, very soldierly and erect in his bearing, with vigorous, decisive speech. As he enters MOLYNEUX looks up, removes his hat, and crushes the note into his pocket.

FOOTMAN.

General Williams.

[He retires.]

[The GENERAL nods curtly to MOLYNEUX, and ignores the half movement to shake hands on the part of the latter.]

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[Cheerfully.] Ah, General—how are you?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[Somewhat abruptly.] I'm all right. Where's Gabrielle?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

I don't know. I've only this moment come in myself.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

They said she was at home.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

We'll see. *[He rings.]* Lovely weather, isn't it?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Very.

[*He sits. A Footman enters.*

MR. MOLYNEUX.

Is Mrs. Molyneux in ?

FOOTMAN.

Yes, sir, in the boudoir.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

Have you told her General Williams is here ?

FOOTMAN.

No, sir ; Mr. Hollesdaile is with her.

[*The GENERAL makes a movement, which does not escape MOLYNEUX.*

MR. MOLYNEUX.

Well ?

FOOTMAN.

Madam's instructions are that when Mr. Hollesdaile is with her she is not to be disturbed.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Imperturbably—with a quick look at the GENERAL.*]

Ah—go and tell her.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, sir.

[*He crosses the room, and goes through the opposite door.*

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Were you unaware of this?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

What, my dear General?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Gabrielle's closeting herself in this fashion with——

MR. MOLYNEUX.

With Mr. Hollesdaile? Oh yes. He comes every day, I believe.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Indeed!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

He's a very interesting fellow, you know—a great novelist, they say. And your niece has profound admiration for genius.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Angrily.*] Psha!

[*The FOOTMAN returns.*

FOOTMAN.

Madam sends her compliments to General Williams, and hopes he won't mind waiting a few minutes; Mr. Hollesdaile is just finishing a chapter.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

Very well.

[*The Footman retires.*

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Bounding with indignation.*] Upon my word! [*MOLYNEUX laughs lightly; the GENERAL swings round.*] That makes you laugh?

MR. MOLYNEUX

Why not? He reads his stuff to her—as it pours out—hot from his magnificent brain. He probably tells her she inspires him, and all that sort of thing.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And does he hold her hand while he reads? That's usual, I believe, with these writing fellows!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Much amused.*] Oh, as to that, you had better ask Gabrielle.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You are curiously tolerant, Mr. Molyneux.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

We live in a tolerant age.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

So you see no harm in a fascinating young woman of twenty-seven being closeted day after day with this literary jackanapes?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

None. No harm whatever.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Admirable!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

You see, my dear General, I unfortunately do not write novels, but am a mere prosaic City man. The City does not interest your niece. Mr. Hollesdaile does.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I see. And you approve!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

Why not? I am a great believer in friendship between the sexes.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Yes—you have a remarkably childlike and unsuspecting disposition. The shareholders in the companies you have promoted have more than once commented upon it.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Blithely.*] The average shareholder is a grasping creature, who invariably howls when he loses his money.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Looking round.*] You have made good use of his money!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Genially.*] I do what I can, General, I do what I can. [The GENERAL rises impatiently, and walks up and down. MOLYNEUX surveys him benevolently, and proceeds to draw on his gloves.] This poor man Hollesdaile appears to worry you; but, really, there is no cause. Why should I deny Gabrielle a little innocent amusement? We have no children; our tastes are dissimilar; we have, unfortunately, had differences, as you know. Under these circumstances it is surely best that we should allow each other considerable latitude. I claim no right to interfere in my wife's friendships—

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

So long as your wife does not interfere with yours—eh? Does Miss—I forget the name of your present Sultana—write novels too?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*With a pleasantly deprecating smile.*] Really!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Smile—that's right—smile!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

How else would you have me meet so shocking an insinuation?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Stopping in his walk and facing MOLYNEUX.*] I appear to afford you considerable amusement, Mr. Molyneux?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

I am afraid, General, that you persist in misunderstanding me.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Because I decline to regard it as your generosity that enables Gabrielle to compromise herself with this man?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Pausing as he was about to button his glove.*] Compromise?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*With rising indignation.*] I know you better, my friend; you are a careful schemer; your wife is in the way; you would like to get rid of her; you have vague hopes of a divorce.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Blandly.*] What an imagination!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And so you hold the door open. You are very unsuspecting, but you keep a careful watch; you see this intimacy growing, and you chuckle to yourself. Your conduct is a scandal, sir; a scandal and a disgrace, and you deserve to be horsewhipped

MR. MOLYNEUX.

General!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Stepping close to him.*] No airs with me, Master Molyneux! You induced my niece to run away with you eight years ago, and she has had seven years and eleven months wherein to repent her folly! You've

had differences, have you? I know something of these differences! When I found the wretched girl on my doorstep, not a year after her marriage——

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*With complete self-control.*] You brought her back!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Yes—I brought her back—I have regretted it often enough! But I hoped that you might reform—that the child about to be born might alter you.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Calmly.*] A man may expect some mercy from his wife—I met with none. You brought her back; we have since lived separate lives. That was not my desire. The child died—we became more and more estranged; that was not wholly my fault. Your niece's love was a very fleeting thing, my dear General, and after her treatment of me I don't pretend to any profound attachment for her.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Her treatment of you!

MR. MOLYNEUX.

But of her reputation I am still the careful guardian

—believe it or not. You mentioned the word “Compromise” in connection with her. Am I to understand—

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Turning on his heel.*] You can understand what you please.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

Your violence to-day is evidently due to some report you have heard.

[*The GENERAL goes to the bell and rings violently.*]

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*Quietly.*] You may rely upon me to do what is necessary.

[FOOTMAN comes in.]

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Tell your mistress I am still waiting.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, sir.

[*He crosses the room, and retires through the opposite door.*

MR. MOLYNEUX.

You will excuse me—I must go to the City.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Testily.*] You can go to the Devil.

[*Mr. MOLYNEUX smiles, takes up his hat, throws open the French window, and passes out.* The GENERAL paces restlessly to and fro; another FOOTMAN comes in from the hall, ushering MRS. MELLISSENT. She is a handsome woman of thirty, very fashionably dressed.

FOOTMAN.

Mrs. Mellissent.

[*He retires.*

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Holding out her hand.*] My dear General—what a delightful surprise! You are usually invisible in the afternoon—they say you devote it to being manicured and having your fortune told. Where is Gabrielle?

[*The FOOTMAN returns from the boudoir.*

FOOTMAN.

Mrs. Molyneux begs you to forgive her, sir; she will be with you in two minutes.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Very well.

[*The FOOTMAN retires.*

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Sitting.*] Oh, she's still with Mr. Hollesdaile ?
They're late to-day.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Sitting opposite her, and trying to conceal his annoyance.*] Are you an admirer of his, too ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Of course—we all are ! A genius—and handsome—and shy—such a rare combination ! What woman wouldn't wish to have such a head to play with ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Can't you get a scribbler of your own ? They're so plentiful !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Merrily.*] It's hard on you, of course—but swords have had their day—and we love the smell of ink ! And seriously, Mr. Hollesdaile's very clever ; he's the only one of them all who understands us women.
[*The GENERAL chuckles.*] Why do you laugh ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Because I'm sixty-five.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

That's no reason. When I am sixty-five—which I hope I never shall be—I shall weep. Don't you like his women?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I'm proud to say I don't know them.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

You tell me unblushingly that you haven't read his books?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I do.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And the Board School rate a shilling in the pound! But, of course, you cling to the fossils—Fielding, Thackeray, and so on.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

They knew something of human nature, I fancy, those fossils.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Of their day, General—but women were very different then—they were in the chrysalis stage.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And now—are they all butterflies?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

The butterfly is a far more mysterious creature than you imagine.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I've run pins through many a hundred of them in my time.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

You'd have learned far more from simply watching them fly!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

We limit ourselves to that when we're old, and can't run.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And the woman of to-day doesn't care for having pins run through her heart! . . . Ah! she's a very different creature from your Sophia Westerns and Laura Bells!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

She is, with a vengeance! She has put her natural instincts to pawn, to buy farthingsworths of culture?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Very amused.*] And what may those natural instincts be, dear Marcus Aurelius?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Very earnestly.*] To bring children into the world and feed them with her milk; to cherish them in her heart and train them with her soul.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

We'll do all that by electricity soon, General!

[*The GENERAL turns away rather angrily; a FOOTMAN comes in with MR. and MRS. HOPKINSON—an ordinary, vulgar-looking man, and a feebly pretty, simpering woman of forty.*

FOOTMAN.

Mr. and Mrs. Hopkinson.

[*He goes.*

MRS. HOPKINSON.

[*Shaking hands with MRS. MELLISSENT.*] Alice—
[*she shakes hands with the GENERAL.*] How are you, General—my husband, Mr. Hopkinson — General Williams. Where is Gabrielle?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Mr. Hollesdaile is finishing a chapter.

MRS. HOPKINSON.

He's not gone yet? Oh, I do hope she'll bring him in here! How lovely for her, isn't it? Fancy his sitting there before you, reading his day's work, looking at you with those great eyes of his, and asking your opinion. I should die of fright!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*To the GENERAL.*] There! And Minnie's a publisher's wife!

MRS. HOPKINSON.

It was I introduced him to her. She owes me a deep debt of gratitude, doesn't she? Such a privilege to have a man like that for an intimate friend!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Think what a thrice-blessed being his wife must be!
[*The ladies smile.*] He has a wife, has he not?

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Yes—poor thing!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You know her?

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Oh, I called—just to see what she was like. *Such a*

dowdy! And could only say yes and no, and didn't think this and wondered the other—and had a child or two trailing behind her all the time! She's a lot older than he is, you know. *Very* sad, isn't it?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Why?

MRS. HOPKINSON.

These poor fellows all marry the wrong sort of women, you see, when they're very young, just to have a home; and it does seem hard that they can't put them away afterwards and make them a decent allowance, doesn't it?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Snorting.*] Very! A man who writes books—how wonderful! You can't expect such a godlike creature to do his duty, like the rest of us!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

The dear General's always nailing his flag to the mast and expecting that this day each man shall do his duty!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And why not?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

We're all Free Traders nowadays, and want the duties taken off!

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Oh Alice!

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*To the GENERAL.*] But as for Mr. Hollesdaile, sir, you will allow me to say that he really is a very extraordinary person, very. And a rare instance of genius being at once appreciated by the public.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You are his publisher, eh?

MR. HOPKINSON.

I'm proud to say I've brought out every one of his books. I recognised his stupendous ability from the start. Don't you admire him, sir?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Profoundly.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Wicked warrior! You haven't read a word of his!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

One cannot but admire an author whose publisher speaks of him in such terms.

MR. HOPKINSON.

No better than he deserves! Why—the *edition de luxe*—limited to a thousand copies—is at fifty per cent. premium on the market already!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Which is Fame.

MR. HOPKINSON.

Well, if it isn't, I'd like to know what was!

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Here is Gabrielle!

[GABRIELLE enters from the door on the right.
She is a tall, slender woman of twenty-seven, with dark flashing eyes, and masses of coal-black hair. Her face at times seems lifeless, colourless, null; but the mere passage of a thought that interests her suddenly endows her irregular features with a strange and almost bewildering fascination. She shakes hands hurriedly

with MRS. HOPKINSON and MRS. MELLISSENT, nods to HOPKINSON, and goes to GENERAL WILLIAMS with outstretched hands.

GABRIELLE.

My dear uncle, I am so sorry to have kept you waiting. But you will forgive me; I really could not get away, though I wanted to, ever so much. It's such a long time since I've seen you. Where have you been? You are not angry with me?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Quietly.*] Where is the great man?

GABRIELLE.

He begged to be excused; he has been reading for two hours; his head ached—

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

H'm. . . .

HOPKINSON.

[*Eagerly to GABRIELLE.*] You like it?

GABRIELLE.

The finest thing he has done.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Has he found a name for it?

GABRIELLE.

“The Soul of a Woman.”

HOPKINSON.

[*Sententiously.*] That’s a good title.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Very ; and so startlingly original ; it smacks of a discovery. How old is your genius, Mr. Hopkinson ?

HOPKINSON.

About thirty-five, I think.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

The dear General doesn’t think that men should write about women till they are sixty-five.

GABRIELLE.

[*Laughing.*] The men or the women ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

The men !

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Fancy making a woman of sixty-five your heroine !

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Is that so ludicrous ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Pathetic! After, let us say forty-five, there is nothing left for a woman but to become a grand mother, and grub among the heap of ashes known as domestic virtues. . . . A rapid descent from the sublime—to the chaperone!

[A FOOTMAN enters ushering LADY PATTERSON,
a very thin, parched, faded woman,
elaborately painted and powdered.

FOOTMAN.

Lady Patterson.

[He retires.

LADY PATTERSON.

[Volubly.] Dear Gabrielle—I can't stop a minute—how are you, General—ah, Alice—General, I'm glad to see you looking so well—Gabrielle, I've come to scold you; I've just been at poor Lady Clara's—why have you refused the stall at her bazaar?

GABRIELLE.

Because I am weary of bazaars—but why poor Lady Clara?

LADY PATTERSON.

[Sitting.] Oh, my dear, haven't you heard? So awkward, just when she's bringing out this bazaar, too!

GABRIELLE.

I've heard nothing

LADY PATTERSON.

Oh it seems there has been an awful scene. But really she was too imprudent!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Demurely.*] Is it Mr. Hamilton or the Frenchman?

LADY PATTERSON.

Mr. Hamilton . . . Sir Joseph intercepted a letter—people *will* write letters! . . . They say he struck him—absolutely struck him! It has been hushed up for the sake of the children—and we none of us speak of it. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Poor Lady Clara! . . . How fortunate that she still has M. de Grandville!

LADY PATTERSON.

[*Prudishly.*] My dear Alice. . . . You really are too—decadent. . . . But this bazaar—Gabrielle, we

must have you—we must—don't shake your head! I promised that I would persuade you. Alice has a stall, you know— By the way [to MRS. MELLISSENT] what is it you are selling?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Demurely.*] Gentlemen's underclothing.

LADY PATTERSON.

What!

GABRIELLE.

Alice!

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Oh!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I shall have three sizes—small, medium, and tall. Everything sweetly done up in pink and blue ribbons.

LADY PATTERSON.

[*Shaking her head.*] Very daring, I must say!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

In the cause of charity! I want to get as near as I can to the heart of man—wherefore I offer him vests.

LADY PATTERSON.

H'm—well—some people are very . . . introspective . . . nowadays; I prefer to be superficial myself, at least in the way of clothes. . . . But, Gabrielle, tell me that you'll take a stall. We count on you.

GABRIELLE.

Mr. Molyneux will send a cheque.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

You see Gabrielle has no sins that need recovering!

LADY PATTERSON.

[*With intention.*] I suppose Mr. Hollesdaile doesn't approve of bazaars. . . . In which case—of course—How is your . . . er . . . friend, Gabrielle?

GABRIELLE.

He's very well, thank you.

LADY PATTERSON.

Quite the man of the hour! Have you seen the book some one has written about him, "The Art of David Hollesdaile"? [*In a sly whisper to GABRIELLE.*] Not the *heart*, my dear—you could write about that! Ha! ha!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I met a funny little German professor yesterday who had been translating him, and vowed he was our greatest writer since—since—some one or other whose name I forget, and indeed had never heard before!

LADY PATTERSON.

Gabrielle's pleased! But I don't think it's right of the great man to make her drop her old friends—do you, Alice?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

She can't drop me—I've too much bounce! [*She rises.*] Well, I must be going. Good-bye, Gabrielle; will you give me some dinner to-morrow night?

GABRIELLE.

Of course.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

My daughter's home from school, and I must have an evening off after being maternal all day. Good-bye, General.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Good-bye.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*To the GENERAL.*] You shake hands coldly—as a brewer might with a temperance lecturer. I am afraid I have shocked you.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Politely.*] By no means.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

My remarks may seem a little—*décolletée*—at first; but they never take the air without an elderly moral hurrying behind them. In fact, I am a woman with a mission—to record the follies of the hour.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Like a Parliamentary Blue Book?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Blue Book or Yellow Book, as you please—but not a bad book, if you would take the trouble to read the first chapters. Will you come to my stall?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Certainly; and I will try to read between the—ribbons.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Do—and search for the symbol! Good-bye again, Gabrielle—Lady Patterson.

LADY PATTERSON.

[*Rising.*] I am going too—perhaps I can drive you—my carriage is here. Good-bye, Gabrielle—I am very angry, remember, and you can tell Mr. Hollesdaile so. Good-bye, General—I shall hope to see you at *my* stall too—though I am not so modern, or symbolic, as Mrs. Mellissent; *I* only sell flowers.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Who has shaken hands with the HOPKINSONS.*] And you the fairest rosebud of them all! Good-bye, good-bye!

[*She carries off LADY PATTERSON; they go out together.*

MRS. HOPKINSON.

[*To HOPKINSON.*] Are you coming, Charles?

MR. HOPKINSON.

I would like just one word with Mrs. Molyneux.

[*To GABRIELLE.*] May I?

GABRIELLE.

Certainly.

[MRS. HOPKINSON retires to the back of the room and sits beside the GENERAL.

MR. HOPKINSON.

[To GABRIELLE.] I know the interest you take in our friend [Hollesdaile, and the influence you have over him. I am anxious to say something to you.

GABRIELLE.

Yes?

MR. HOPKINSON.

I may speak to you quite frankly, may I not? You and I are—er—

GABRIELLE.

Well?

MR. HOPKINSON.

[Drawing his chair close to hers and speaking very confidentially.] He's going to the bad, Mrs. Molyneux!

GABRIELLE.

What do you mean?

MR. HOPKINSON.

I've argued—I've begged and prayed—but it's no use—no use at all.

GABRIELLE.

I really am quite at a loss to——

MR. HOPKINSON.

It's like this. You know how his first four or five books sold—we couldn't print 'em fast enough. They gave him a big reputation. Between you and me he has been living on that reputation ever since and has pretty nearly exhausted it.

GABRIELLE.

'Surely not !

MR. HOPKINSON.

He changed his style in his last two books; his style, his manner, his subjects—and the public ain't with him! "Children of Fire"—that was last year's—went poorly; but "The Poet's Prayer" is a dead failure; dead as mutton already, and it hasn't been out three months!

GABRIELLE.

But you advertise the seventh edition ?

MR. HOPKINSON.

That means nothing—I haven't sold out the second! I must boom it, to help off the *edition de luxe*, which, between you and me, drags terribly.

GABRIELLE.

I'm sorry—but how can I help you? Those last two books have made him famous; they're known all over Europe.

MR. HOPKINSON.

Oh yes, I know that—but that don't help to sell 'em here. Clever people may rave about 'em; but clever people have no money to spend on books. No Mrs. Molyneux, he's out of touch with his market. Whenever I meet him he talks about Art. Now that's a bad way for a man to get into!

GABRIELLE.

[*Amused.*] Very.

MR. HOPKINSON.

He says he's not writing this book for me, and hopes I'll refuse it! That he don't care a dump whether it sells or not! When a man's in a state like that he wants a friend badly.

GABRIELLE.

So you wish me to—

MR. HOPKINSON.

Get him back to his earlier manner—cynical, brilliant society talk—with a touch of—you know!

He can make his thousands a year! But I tell you if we have any more books like these last two, it's all up with David Hollesdaile!

GABRIELLE.

[*Rising.*] You mean you won't publish for him any more?

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Rising.*] I can't! I'm losing money! Now tell me—he's been reading to you?

GABRIELLE.

Every word—

MR. HOPKINSON.

Yes—and—?

GABRIELLE.

Of course I can't speak to you about it! But I think you are very amusing.

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Taken aback.*] Amusing! I scarcely expected you would look at things in *that* light!

GABRIELLE.

I value Mr. Hollesdaile's reputation more than your profits, Mr. Hopkinson.

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Sourly.*] Very well, ma'm, you'll help to ruin him, that's all. I've done what I could. Minnie!

[*Mrs. HOPKINSON comes up, after having said good-bye to the GENERAL.*

MRS. HOPKINSON.

Good-bye, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE.

[*Rings the bell.*] Good-bye, Minnie. Come again soon. Good-bye, Mr. Hopkinson.

[*HOPKINSON bows, and goes off with his wife.*

GABRIELLE.

[*Moving towards the GENERAL.*] What do you think the funny little man wanted of me?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Grimly.*] I am wondering whether the conversation in your drawing-room is usually up to the high moral and intellectual level of to-day?

GABRIELLE.

[*With a smile.*] Poor uncle! I was afraid you were not enjoying yourself! . . . Alice lets her tongue run away with her. She is a good little woman, really—the best of them all!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

So that to-day *was* above the average ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Moving restlessly to and fro.*] You should hear them on my At Home days ! Scandal, and horses, and gold mines ! You know what sort of people come here. Men with prospectuses, who are proud of having seen "The Belle of New York" twenty times, and their wives, who are proud of their husbands ! But fortunately I don't see so much of them now.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Meaningly.*] Since you have formed this extraordinary intimacy with Mr. Hollesdaile ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Laughing.*] My dear uncle, don't scowl at me like that ! Extraordinary—why ? I've spoken of him.

GENERAL WILLIAMS

I understood that he came as an ordinary visitor.

GABRIELLE.

We are friends. Are you not glad that I have such a friend ? you who know what the others are like. You are angry with me for having kept you waiting.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I am angry with you for allowing this person to monopolise you.

GABRIELLE.

[*Going to the GENERAL and sitting by his side.*] I want you to meet him. You and he have much in common. He is good, too. And his mind is beautiful. I listen to him day after day. I sit there and listen. I hear the same chapter over and over again, perhaps, and watch it through all its changes, as his thought takes deeper root. And his thoughts are unlike those of other men.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You are curiously enthusiastic.

GABRIELLE.

Yes—why not? Need you wonder, you who know how terribly, crushingly empty my life has been?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Your life has been what you chose it to be.

GABRIELLE.

A woman never chooses. As a girl she wants to be happy—she has a wild craving for happiness—she looks up, and she sees a man. . . . And after that,

her horizon narrows day by day, till at last—at last . . . If only my child had lived! . . . But at least I have found a friend!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Rising impatiently.*] Yes—you have found a friend!

GABRIELLE.

There is sympathy between us. He is alone, too.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

So this noble creature runs down his wife to you?

GABRIELLE.

Uncle! That is not generous. There is no question of running down. His wife does not understand him—that is all.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And you do?

GABRIELLE.

We have much in common. We are both a little bruised by life—we both are sensitive—perhaps we both dream dreams. . . . And I—have you ever gone out after a storm, and seen a flower that has almost been wrenched from its stem—but the sun comes out, and the warmth and gladness revive it, and it once

more struggles to live. . . . I am like that. I am beginning to forget, beginning to hope Oh be glad of this friend of mine !

GENERAL WILLIAMS

He comes here every day ?

GABRIELLE

Yes.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And you are always alone with him ?

GABRIELLE

Of course. Could he talk, could he read his work to me, before the women you saw here ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You have had men friends before

GABRIELLE.

They made love to me—their friendship was a sham. I had almost grown to believe that men were all brutes at heart.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And he is so unlike the rest ?

GABRIELLE.

His mind is almost feminine in its purity. He forgets my sex. When I am with him I find my hardness and bitterness melting away. I am a different woman. I realise there is something to do in the world, something to live for. . . . Why do you look at me like that? Why refuse to believe in this friendship of ours?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[Slowly and emphatically.] Because I do not believe in you.

GABRIELLE.

[Rising and moving away.] That is a cruel thing to say. . . .

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Is it not justified?

GABRIELLE.

No.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Should I not know you, I who brought you up from a child? I was a lonely man and I loved you. One night I came home—you were gone.

GABRIELLE.

I was a child—unconscious—a creature of instinct !
Madly in love—and with no mother to guide me. . . .
And have I not been punished enough ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Then you left him—oh I'm not making excuses for him ! But the man was repentant—you might have forgiven.

GABRIELLE.

There are some things a woman can never forgive.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I patched up a truce between you—you insisted on one condition.

GABRIELLE.

Yes.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

That is seven years ago—I hoped you would change—but you did not. You were selfish and hard then, as you are to-day. . . . Oh, I tell you the truth ! You might have forgiven—have looked for, and fostered, the good that there must be in every man——

GABRIELLE.

Some women might have done it—I could not ! I am not a good woman perhaps ; you say I am selfish

and hard; but my suffering had been too great. . .
Oh why drag up this miserable past; why harrow me
now with all that is gone?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Because I wish you to give up this friendship of
yours.

GABRIELLE.

[*Stopping dead short.*] To give it up!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

There is only one end to an intimacy of this kind.

GABRIELLE.

What do you mean? We are friends. We shall
always remain where we are.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

The man has a wife, has he not?

GABRIELLE.

Yes—of course—what of her?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Are you conscious of no injustice to her in binding
her husband to your footstool?

GABRIELLE.

Uncle, uncle, all this is absurd—the merest convention! What wrong am I doing his wife?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Shall she be indifferent to the report that you are her husband's—mistress? [*There is silence; GABRIELLE stares at him, petrified, unable to speak.*] I heard it to-day. It is common talk, they tell me.

GABRIELLE.

Impossible, impossible. . . .

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

That Lady Patterson, with her innuendo—she believes it; they probably all believe it!

GABRIELLE.

No, no, they can't be so vile!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I have told you what people are saying. And your course now is clear. You must break off at once—and entirely.

GABRIELLE.

[*Feverishly.*] No.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

What ! You will not ?

GABRIELLE.

No !

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And your reputation ?

GABRIELLE.

Those who know me know that this thing is a lie.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And I, who ask it of you ?

GABRIELLE.

You cannot be so unjust.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Shall I stand by and watch them all spit on you ?
Because your life is empty must you paddle your
fingers in this man's brain ?

GABRIELLE.

Oh, listen to me, listen ! I swear to you that not
a word has passed between us that all the world might
not hear !

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Then why cling to him so passionately ?

GABRIELLE.

Because my life is blank without him ; null ; a desert and despair ! In all these years I have found one friend—you bid me renounce him !

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Self, self, self ! You think of nothing but self ! Your agitation at the mere thought of giving up this blackguard shows what the intimacy would become—if it has not already !

GABRIELLE.

Then you do not believe me ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

From the moment your reputation is in danger——

GABRIELLE.

Oh, what a curse it is to be a woman !

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Do your duty !

GABRIELLE.

[*Passionately.*] It was because of what people would

say that you carried me back to my husband, who had made my own servant a mother! Because of what people would say that I have dragged through these terrible years! And now you come to me, with the same pitiful story, and bid me abandon my friend!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Sternly.*] Yes.

GABRIELLE.

[*With sudden, fierce determination.*] Uncle, I will not.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Think.

GABRIELLE.

I will not.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You refuse?

GABRIELLE.

You have no right to ask it of me.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

For the last time!

GABRIELLE.

No—and no—and no!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Then good-bye.

[*He gathers up hat and stick, and makes for the door. GABRIELLE turns pleadingly towards him; the door opens, and the FOOTMAN enters with DAVID HOLLES-DAILE.*

FOOTMAN.

Mr. Hollesdaile.

[*The FOOTMAN retires. The GENERAL pauses for an instant; looks hard at DAVID; then goes.*

GABRIELLE.

Oh why have you come back ?

DAVID.

[*With a merry laugh.*] To tell you, to tell you !

GABRIELLE.

What ?

DAVID.

What ? Why that there are swans in the park, and nursemaids, and perambulators ! Also—a mere trifle—that what I read to you to-day was wrong—all wrong—it troubled us both, did it not ? and that now it is clear to me, crystal clear !

GABRIELLE.

[*Faintly.*] I am glad. . . .

DAVID.

Of course you are glad! I have been wandering about since I left you, perplexed and disconsolate; I couldn't go home. And I lay on the grass, and half closed my eyes, and it came! And I couldn't resist the desire to run back here and tell you. Such a trifle, you know—a mere touch—but it makes all the difference! And do you know where the great flaw is? Just listen—it's wonderful—it—

[*He pulls out a notebook and opens it.*]

GABRIELLE.

[*Stopping him with a gesture.*] Not now—please—

DAVID.

[*Disappointed.*] No? . . . It's true—I've worried you enough for to-day. I'll go home and work; you shall hear it to-morrow.

GABRIELLE.

No, no, you had better not come to-morrow.

DAVID.

[*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Mrs. Molyneux! Have you

been making an engagement for one of *my* afternoons?

GABRIELLE.

. . . I am afraid that you must not come here any more at all. . . .

DAVID.

[*Starting to his feet.*] What! You don't mean that?

GABRIELLE.

Don't make it too hard for me. . . . You know how I value your friendship. . . . But we live in a muddy world.

DAVID.

[*Very earnestly.*] Where you and I meet there is no mud! We meet on the mountain.

GABRIELLE.

But there are no people there—or at least very few; and the rest look for us in the gutter, where they swear they have seen us. Or in plain English—but no—I can't say it! You are a man, and I am a woman; and therefore we must not be friends.

DAVID.

[*Very pale.*] Your husband?

GABRIELLE.

He! . . . No. It was my uncle—you passed him just now; the one person on earth who loves me. . . . He has heard rumours.

DAVID.

About—us? [GABRIELLE *nods.*] Is there a creature living who dares reflect on our friendship?

GABRIELLE.

Say rather is there one who believes in it!

DAVID.

Mrs. Molyneux!

GABRIELLE.

My fault! I was so eager to have you for friend! I am hard and selfish, my uncle says—and it's true; I have only thought of myself. It was I who induced you to call, and strove hard to interest you—I was so lonely! And now—we must say good-bye. . . .

DAVID.

No! . . . Because of this idle gossip? I will see your uncle—tell him—

GABRIELLE.

Will you stop the mouths of all the crawling reptiles
who declare that I am—your mistress ?

DAVID.

My God !

GABRIELLE.

And your wife ? She believes it too, perhaps ! I
have never thought of your wife. I pictured her to
myself vaguely, happy with her children, tending
them, loving them. It never occurred to me that
she could be jealous.

DAVID.

[*Uneasily.*] Jealous ! Why should she be ?

GABRIELLE.

Ah see ! You admit it ! . . . How cruel I have
been to her ! We must say good-bye to each other,
you and I.

DAVID.

And does it mean so little to you, this friendship of
ours, that you can give it up so lightly ?

GABRIELLE.

It means so little to me that I cannot even bring

myself to think of the future. But yet—it has to be done.

DAVID.

Hear me too! Of myself I say nothing—but there is my work, which is your work too! . . . For you have awakened a force in me—a power—without you I am nothing; I fall to the ground.

GABRIELLE.

You imagine all this. . . .

DAVID.

Till I met you I worked as other men work; but now—I feel—I feel—oh do not regard me as merely a braggart or fool—but since you have let me come here, day by day, and see you, and hear you, I have been conscious of—I have had thoughts—oh I tell you, give me time, give me courage, your sympathy, the light that shines from you, I will do such work that men who know of us both shall fall on their knees for shame of their villainous slanders!

GABRIELLE.

[Enthusiastically.] You will do the work—oh I have no fear! I know you—am proud of you! . . . But I must obey—and you—must consider your wife.

DAVID.

Go to her! Go to my wife! See her, know her, be her friend, as you are mine! [GABRIELLE *shakes her head with a sorrowful smile.*] She has not your brain, your poetry, but she too is noble and good. She will welcome you, love you. Is not this the solution—the answer to all?

GABRIELLE.

It is impossible.

DAVID.

I ask you to try.

GABRIELLE.

I might try—and she would try too—but it would all be in vain. She could never forgive me.

DAVID.

For what?

GABRIELLE.

For your friendship . . . It would not be possible . . . And you know that too, in your heart . . . Let us say good-bye. . . .

DAVID.

Gabrielle, Gabrielle, I cannot.

GABRIELLE.

Help me to do what is right. . . .

[*There is silence, as they stand facing each other.*

MOLYNEUX comes in quietly through the French window; they both look up with a start.

MR. MOLYNEUX.

[*In easy conversational tones.*] Ah Mr. Hollesdaile, I have a word to say to you that it is as well I should say in the presence of Mrs. Molyneux. Her uncle has made certain representations to me—it appears that your visits have been misconstrued. I of course very deeply regret—but, for the sake of the convenances——

DAVID.

You desire my visits to cease?

MR. MOLYNEUX.

I must leave you to place your own interpretation upon my words——

GABRIELLE.

[*To DAVID, in bitter anger.*] My dear friend, you

will tell your wife that I will call on her to-morrow at four.

[She holds out her hand, which DAVID takes ; he turns silently to the door, MOLYNEUX surveying them both with an indulgent smile. GABRIELLE swings round and faces her husband as the curtain falls.

CURTAIN.

THE SECOND ACT

The study in DAVID HOLLESDAILE'S house. It is a large and pleasant room, of irregular shape, with a painter's top-light, and a long, low window which runs the whole side of the wall. Beneath it is an eighteenth century settle. There are two or three old-fashioned oak tables, and various massive old Dutch and Flemish chairs. At the back there is a door, which, when open, shows a landing and stairs leading upwards; another door, on the left, which is curtained, leads to the inner rooms. The walls are lined with dwarf bookcases, filled with books; above them are photographs of Holbeins, Botticellis and Da Vincis. A large oil painting of the Madonna fills the centre panel. An old-fashioned writing desk is placed sideways in the centre of the room; adjoining it is a long, narrow, black oak table, covered with reviews, books and manuscripts in picturesque

disorder. The floor is stained, and covered with rugs. HANNAH, an old servant, is dusting the books and papers on the table. CLARA enters quickly from the inner door. She is a short, fair woman of rather a squat figure, plainly dressed in a stuff gown, without any ornament; her hair, of a dull brown, which she wears parted down the middle of her head, shows a streak or two of grey; her features are heavy and ordinary, but a rare smile lights up her face, and makes it almost attractive.

CLARA.

[*Going hastily to Hannah.*] You shouldn't have touched the papers, Hannah; you may have disarranged them.

HANNAH.

Master told me to tidy up the room, 'm.

CLARA.

You know how he hates having his papers touched,

HANNAH.

I've been very careful, 'm.

CLARA.

We'll put the flowers here.

[*She takes some books off the top of the writing-desk, and puts them on the table.*

HANNAH.

Where are the flowers, 'm?

CLARA.

Master's gone to fetch them.

HANNAH.

[*Glancing up.*] You're not looking well, 'm.

CLARA.

I've a headache; I've been lying down. . . . Is Mary with the children?

HANNAH.

[*Dusting the book-shelves.*] Yes, 'm, and they're *that* good! A pity master don't see more of 'em!

CLARA.

. . . He can't stand the noise. . . .

HANNAH.

Poor little things, they don't dare to speak, 'ardly, when 'e's a-workin'. Bobby was crying, yesterday,

when I went into the nursery ; he said he had sneezed three times, and hoped father hadn't heard him !

[*A ring.*

CLARA.

There's a ring, Hannah. . . . Surely it can't be——

HANNAH.

Oh no, 'm, it ain't three yet.

[*HANNAH goes. CLARA listens anxiously. After a moment, MRS. HOLLESDAILE enters. She is a pleasant, motherly old lady, with soft grey hair that still curls naturally over her temples. Her dress is very neat and simple, but worn almost to shabbiness ; she carries two or three parcels in her hand.*

CLARA.

Mother ! This *is* a surprise ! [She kisses MRS. HOLLESDAILE affectionately, and relieves her of her parcels.] When did you come back from Eastbourne ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Slightly puffing from the stairs.*] Late last night, my dear. They wanted John at the office ; he had to shorten his holiday. You're expecting a visitor, Hannah tells me ?

CLARA.

Yes. . . . Mrs. Molyneux; a friend of David's.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Indifferently.*] Ah, and the children, Clara?

CLARA.

They're all right, mother. Bobby's had a bad cold.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Is it better?

CLARA.

Oh yes, thanks.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

And my boy?

CLARA.

David? Oh David's very well.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

And tell me about the new book.

CLARA.

[*After a moment's pause.*] He seems very pleased with it. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I'm glad of that ! It's so seldom he's satisfied with what he's doing. And do you like it, dear ?

CLARA.

I ? . . . Oh, I don't know. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

How's that, Clara ?

CLARA.

I mean I—I—the fact is I know nothing about it

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Very surprised.*] What do you mean ?

CLARA.

[*Quietly, with sudden resolve.*] I had better tell you, mother. There has been a . . . change here these past few weeks.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

A change ! . . . My dear Clara ! What has happened ?

CLARA.

Oh—nothing so very important, perhaps . . . but

you know he used to read every line he wrote to me—
and now—— [*She pauses.*]

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Well?

CLARA.

He reads it all to her.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Her? Who?

CLARA.

The woman who's coming to-day. [*A moment's silence.*] I hadn't meant to say anything—what's the use? They—are great friends . . . he and she. He goes there every day and stops with her for hours.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

You haven't let him see that you——

CLARA.

I'm afraid I broke down once or twice—I couldn't help it.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Ah!—and——

CLARA.

He put it down to nerves . . .

[*Silence again ; CLARA and MRS. HOLLESDAILE look steadily away from each other.*]

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Prodding the floor.*] And how long has this——

CLARA.

He met her three months ago, just as he was beginning this new book. . . . She wrote to him ; letters were always coming from her. And he answered. . . . And, little by little——

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

You never told me, Clara. . . .

CLARA.

No—he has had fancies before—I thought——

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*With enforced cheeriness.*] Well—of course it means nothing, my dear. . . .

CLARA.

[*Rising.*] I'll show you her photograph.

[*She goes to the desk, opens it, and from a*

drawer takes out a photograph, which she hands to MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Reading the inscription.*] "To David Hollesdaile, from his friend Gabrielle." H'm. . . . Did he——

CLARA.

[*With an embarrassed laugh.*] Oh, no—I . . . found it—in his desk.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

It's rather a hard face . . . Well, I shall see her, perhaps, if she comes soon.

[*She returns the photo, which CLARA replaces in the desk.*

CLARA.

She'll be here at four.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Aren't you going to put on that pretty grey silk of yours, Clara?

CLARA.

No. I'm a plain, unattractive woman of thirty-six with three children, whom I have nursed myself, and a house to look after and keep quiet while David is

writing ; and I don't pretend to compete with a fine lady who hasn't a child of her own and with twenty servants to do the work.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Mildly reproachful.*] My dear Clara. . . .

CLARA.

[*Bitterly.*] Oh I've no patience with that sort of woman, mother ! They don't have children, or they won't have children—and they keep their figures and are handsome till they're sixty—and take away the husbands from us honest ones who do our duty !

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Breathless.*] Clara ! My dear ! I don't know you !

CLARA.

[*Rising.*] I don't know myself, sometimes. . . . But I feel it isn't right.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Rising and going to her.*] We mustn't exaggerate, Clara. . . . You know very well that all this means nothing.

[CLARA compresses her lips and remains silent.]

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Oh I know my boy! You have been quiet about it—very rightly—and he never imagines that it even distresses you. His love is so deep that he never thinks others can doubt him.

CLARA.

[Half to herself.] His love!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE *sits, takes CLARA's hand and forces her into a chair by her side.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Why—when he was at Oxford—I'll tell you a little secret of my own—I was just a little hurt—I was foolish too, you see—because we never saw his rooms there.

CLARA.

Didn't he ask you?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Oh, yes, often—but Clara, dear, I had nothing to wear—and I couldn't disgrace my boy! Only I *had* hoped that he would say "Come as you are—never mind the clothes," but he didn't! And after my pushing and scraping for him from the day he was born almost, and saving out of my few shillings a week,

and using every penny of Uncle William's legacy to send him to Oxford—and he my only child—why, Clara, I was so silly that night after night, when John was asleep, I would cry, and cry, and cry. . . .

CLARA.

[*Nodding her head.*] Yes——

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Hastily.*] But I soon realised how wrong I was—and unfair! The boy didn't think—that was all. It wasn't want of affection! When I was ill, he rushed up to town and never left me till I was better. He lives in the clouds, you see; he doesn't understand the mental troubles that mean so much to us women!

CLARA.

No—he can't understand them——

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Emphatically.*] But he has been a good son, my dear, and a good husband, and he will to the end. His love lies very deep.

CLARA.

[*Looking straight before her.*] He has no love for me. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Clara ! The mother of his children !

CLARA.

We women love the father of our children—it doesn't matter so much to them. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*With uplifted hands.*] My dear, my dear, this is wrong !

CLARA.

I have five hundred a year of my own. I am older than he—and plain. I don't say he married me for my money.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Clara, Clara !

CLARA.

I make myself no illusions, mother ! We have been happy so far because the one thing he cared for on earth was his work ; and there I was useful to him.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Useful—his wife !

CLARA.

I have been his slave—oh a glad and a willing one ! How many hours have I spent in this room, when he wanted to read to me ; and scarcely daring to breathe for fear of disturbing him ! I have never said no to him. I have been his, to do what he liked with. I have spared him all trouble, all worry ; when I was ill, I had always a smile for him. And I was contented ; there was only his work . . . and I . . . till he met this woman . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Dear Clara, you have spoiled him a little, of course, as I did too—but he has always been faithful and loyal——

CLARA.

Till he met this woman !

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Rising in alarm.*] Clara !

CLARA.

[*Passionately.*] Oh, her fault more than his ! He struggled, I know. It was she dragged him into this —friendship !

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

But my dear, my dear, the mere fact of her coming to see you—

CLARA.

To see *me*! Why? Why does she come? She might have done that before. His manner was strange when he told me.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

What did you say to him?

CLARA.

Nothing. What is there to say? I showed you her photograph. Look at me!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Putting her arms around her.*] My dear, dear Clara. . . .

CLARA.

This handsome, fashionable woman wants my husband—will arms like these keep him from her? Oh mother, mother!

[*She drops her head on the old lady's shoulder.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE tries to comfort her; breezy footsteps are heard coming up the

stairs, and DAVID enters jauntily, carrying flowers. CLARA breaks away from MRS. HOLLESDAILE, and turns to the bookcase at back.

DAVID.

[Heartily.] Why, old lady, this *is* a delightful surprise! [He kisses her affectionately.] And how well you're looking. Here, Clara!

[He holds out the flowers without turning round.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

What lovely flowers!

DAVID.

Aren't they? They cost a small fortune. . . . And how is it you're back so soon? Here, Clara. . . . [CLARA comes forward.] The old Italian vase, don't you think? And you'll be careful with them, won't you? [As he hands her the flowers he looks at her.] What—crying?

[CLARA goes out quickly, carrying the flowers.

DAVID.

[In an almost aggrieved tone.] Have you been saying anything to make her cry?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Smiling in spite of herself.*] I? No.

DAVID.

[*Dismissing the subject lightly.*] Well, it's jolly to see you back again, old lady! You had intended to stay longer?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Now that daddy's been made manager of the office, they can't do anything without him—and there's been a sudden rise in sugar, so he had to come back.

DAVID.

How is he?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Very well indeed—we've been away three weeks.
[*She sits.*] You've a friend coming, I hear?

DAVID.

[*With a quick look at her.*] Yes—Mrs. Molyneux.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

And the new book, Davie?

DAVID.

[*Eagerly.*] It's going to be fine, mother, fine . . .

if I'm allowed to finish it in peace. . . . I'm breaking new ground — doing something I've never even attempted before——

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Tell me about it.

DAVID.

I can't. I scarcely seem to know, myself. But I see deeper into life—into all things. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Clara tells me she doesn't know anything of——

DAVID.

No, poor thing, and I'm afraid she feels it. But I can't help it, mother!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Mildly.*] Davie! . . .

DAVID.

'Don't think I'm indifferent, or callous. I'm not. I know that it isn't only nerves that have made Clara cry. And I'm sorry enough for it, too. But I daren't let myself think of it. I must have a tranquil mind for this book of mine. Clara must make this small sacrifice for me.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

It's hard on Clara, Davie.

DAVID.

I know that it's hard ; and she has been splendid—never a word of reproach. But I can't read to her just now—you see I've changed—and how could she understand ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

You have changed ?

DAVID.

Mother, I feel like a man who for years has been digging his potato field, and suddenly picks up a nugget—on the field adjoining. You see ? And the world wants gold.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Then it is your new friend who has——

DAVID.

Yes. . . . I met her at the very moment I needed her. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Who is she ?

DAVID.

She is somebody's wife. We met by chance—it's foolish, perhaps, to call these things chance. She has helped me immensely. Men teach us, you know, but we learn from women. And *such* a woman!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Sorrowfully.*] Is she so clever, Davie?

DAVID.

I don't know; she's strange, magnetic—she draws out what is best in you. It's not what she says, perhaps; it's what she *is* that's so wonderful!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Wonderful?

DAVID.

It helps me only to look at her; it sets something free in me. . . . See, this, is her photograph. . . .

[*He goes to the desk, takes the photograph out of the drawer, and hands it to Mrs. HOLLESDAILE.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Looking at it.*] "Gabrielle."

DAVID.

Yes—it's a foolish name, that doesn't suit her. . . . She should be called Mary, Martha, something simple, tranquil, vast. . . . Gabrielle's a French name ; she isn't French, or even modern ; she's almost Biblical—the Woman before the Fall.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Smiling as she hands back the photograph.*] My dear Davie, you are always the same ; you admire with seven-leagued boots !

DAVID.

It sounds extravagant, of course ; but wait till you've seen her !

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Rising, and gently taking his hand.*] Davie dear, don't forget Clara.

DAVID.

[*In honest surprise.*] Forget Clara, mother ! What do you mean ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

She may not be Biblical, dear, but she is a very good and noble woman ; and there is no greater treasure on earth than her love for you.

DAVID.

[*Laughing heartily and embracing her.*] Oh you dear, sentimental, romantic old lady ? This comes of reading French novels ! Why Clara's my wife, is she not ? Am I likely to forget what she's done for me, been to me ? And mayn't I be grateful too for a friend like Gabrielle ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Doubtfully.*] But——

DAVID.

Ah, mother, mother, be careful. . . . There must be no suspicion—suspicion's too ugly. I couldn't tell you the colour of Gabrielle's eyes or her hair—I don't look at her that way ! You believe me ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Yes—but the future ?

DAVID.

This friendship of ours is a pure and a holy thing. Let it grow, it will be like a tree, in whose shade we can all sit, Clara too. But don't try to stifle or poison it ; for that would be dangerous.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Almost beseechingly.*] Davie, Davie——

DAVID.

My work is my life, mother ; my work comes first —there I must be free. . . . But come—we're taking too serious a tone—and there's really no cause.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I'm an old woman, Davie, old-fashioned, perhaps, but still——

DAVID.

You're a malicious old lady—that's what you are—and not half as sensible as Clara. Hark ! . . . There's the carriage. [*He runs to the window.*] Fetch Clara—quick !

[*He flings open the door, and rushes downstairs.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE remains standing, and heaves a deep sigh ; but forces a cheerful smile as CLARA comes in from the other side. CLARA is carrying the vase of flowers, which she places on the desk ; she has donned a handsome grey silk gown. She looks inquiringly at MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Ah—you *have* changed, Clara !

CLARA.

Yes—it seemed more civil, perhaps. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Patting her cheek.*] You are very wise, my dear. . . . And Clara—I have been talking with him—you have no cause for uneasiness. It's only a brain-influenza, my dear, the heart's not affected! Be nice to her, Clara!

[DAVID *enters with GABRIELLE, and leads her to CLARA.*

DAVID.

This is my wife, Mrs. Molyneux—my victim—I am “gey ill to live with!”

GABRIELLE.

[*Simply.*] I am so so glad to meet you, Mrs. Hollesdaile.

[*They shake hands; CLARA's eyes are fixed on the ground.*

DAVID.

And my mother—a very clever old lady, of whom I am very proud. . . .

GABRIELLE.

[*Shaking hands with MRS. HOLLESDAILE.*] We are not strangers, you know—I've read all about you!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Smiling.*] Yes—I sit for his old women !

GABRIELLE.

What beautiful flowers ! [To CLARA.] You are fond of flowers, Mrs. Hollesdaile ?

CLARA.

. . . It was my husband got those. . . .

GABRIELLE.

[*Moving away indifferently.*] They are lovely. . . . What a large room this is ! Was it built as a studio ?

DAVID.

Yes ; a painter lived here before. . . .

GABRIELLE.

Ah . . . I used to paint, long ago—but I gave it up ; I found I only could copy.

[DAVID places a chair for her ; she sits ; CLARA and MRS. HOLLESDAILE seat themselves at the back, behind the table.

CLARA.

[*Whispering to MRS. HOLLESDAILE.*] She is very beautiful. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Putting CLARA's hand.*] What used you to paint, Mrs. Molyneux?

GABRIELLE.

Allegories—but no one understood them, and I forgot what they meant myself.

DAVID.

Clara used to paint, too.

GABRIELLE.

Indeed? And have you given it up, Mrs. Hollesdaile?

CLARA.

Oh, yes. . . . I had no talent. . . . And then there were the children. . . .

GABRIELLE.

We women have often to bury our talents in the summer of our life, but it may be that they flower the more plentifully in the autumn. [*To MRS. HOLLESDAILE.*] Don't you think so?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

As a girl I fancied that I had a small gift for

writing. And I certainly buried it—for I had no time—and it *has* flowered—here!

[*She touches DAVID on the shoulder.*

GABRIELLE.

Yes—that is the best use perhaps a woman can make of her gifts. . . . [To CLARA.] Your house is deliciously walled in. . . . The garden runs right round it, I suppose?

CLARA.

Yes.

DAVID.

It would be quite a pleasant little garden but for the neighbours' spying windows.

GABRIELLE.

A good place to take one's conscience to for an airing!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I am afraid the poor thing would be unhappy—the place is so *very* exposed!

[*She laughs.*

DAVID.

[*Merrily.*] My mother has one of those big, overgrown consciences—very tender and pulpy—like a snail that's too fat to get back to its shell

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

And Davie's is like a hedgehog, that pricks everyone else, but is very comfortable itself !

DAVID.

[*Laughing.*] You see the liberties she takes with me. No man is a hero to his mother. Won't you take your jacket off, Mrs. Molyneux ? It's very hot in here.

GABRIELLE.

No, thanks ; I've unfastened it. And I can't stop very long.

CLARA.

[*Rises.*] If you will excuse me—I don't know why they're not bringing the tea.

[*She goes out by the door on the right.*

GABRIELLE.

And the children—don't they come down ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Would you really like to see them ?

GABRIELLE.

Oh, yes, please ; I am very fond of children.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

You have none of your own, Mrs. Molyneux?

GABRIELLE.

I had a little girl, but she died.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Sympathetically.*] The only one?

GABRIELLE.

Yes . . . She always was delicate . . . And one night, when I was at a ball . . .

[*She pauses*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

How awful!

GABRIELLE.

Yes, was it not? I have never danced since. She was quite happy when I left her—seemed not at all ill—the doctor hadn't been for days. . . A sudden attack of convulsions—they sent for me—but when I arrived she was dead.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Wiping her eyes.*] I am so sorry.

GABRIELLE.

She was a very sweet little creature.

[*A moment's silence* ; MRS. HOLLESDAILE rises.]

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I will bring the little ones down.

[*She goes out quickly.*]

DAVID.

[*Drawing near to GABRIELLE.*] You never told me of this.

GABRIELLE.

I don't often speak of it.

DAVID.

How good of you to have come !

GABRIELLE.

I had promised . . .

DAVID.

You like my mother, I see, and you will soon make Clara adore you.

GABRIELLE.

Is your wife contented that I should come ?

DAVID.

You see! . . . And I am sure that you will find a great deal to admire in her . . . I was only afraid lest you might not keep your word.

GABRIELLE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] I am not sure but what that would have been wiser.

DAVID.

That kind of wisdom belongs to the gravedigger! And tell me—you talked with Mr. Molyneux?

GABRIELLE.

His house is closed to you.

DAVID.

Shameful!

GABRIELLE.

And we women are told that the one thing we need is a vote! We are each other's worst enemies.

DAVID.

Scandal?

GABRIELLE.

Yes. A woman always believes the worst of another woman. [*She looks around.*] You are happy here.

DAVID.

Now that you have come.

GABRIELLE.

Have you worked to-day?

DAVID.

No—I was anxious, nervous—but I shall. When can I read to you?

GABRIELLE.

That will depend on your wife.

DAVID.

Clara? [*With a laugh.*] Oh, Clara is not like Mr. Molyneux—though this is *her* house, too.

GABRIELLE.

Will she call on me?

DAVID.

Call? Is that necessary?

GABRIELLE.

I cannot come here again unless Mrs. Hollesdaile returns my visit.

DAVID.

Of course—of course ; oh yes, she will call, naturally . . . I had hoped to have read to you to-day.

GABRIELLE.

No. . . . But soon, perhaps. . . . I am glad to have seen the room you work in. . . . And I thank you for the flowers. . . .

DAVID.

[*Impulsively.*] Gabrielle !

GABRIELLE.

[*Drawing back.*] Hush !

[CLARA enters quietly. *A hard look comes over her face on seeing DAVID and GABRIELLE together, but she quickly resumes her normal impassive expression.*

CLARA.

[*Quietly.*] Tea will be here directly.

DAVID.

Mother's gone to fetch the children, Mrs. Molyneux insists on seeing them.

CLARA.

You like children ?

GABRIELLE.

Yes . . . and I am happy to say that they smile on me, as a rule. . . .

[MRS. HOLLESDAILE *comes back.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

They won't come down—they're so shy ! [To GABRIELLE.] You know, if you would really like to see them, why not come upstairs with me ?

GABRIELLE.

Gladly.

DAVID.

I'll go too.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

No—I won't I have you, or Clara. You'll make them self-conscious. [To GABRIELLE.] Their old grandmother never corrects them, you see ; they admit her on terms of equality.

[*She moves to the door, followed by GABRIELLE.*

CLARA.

Tea is coming.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

We shan't be more than a minute. [To GABRIELLE as they go.] The little things are so timid, you know, and the mere ceremony of bringing them down——

[They go. CLARA sits behind the table; DAVID takes a turn up and down the room and then goes to her.

DAVID.

Isn't she splendid?

CLARA.

[Quietly.] She's very handsome.

DAVID.

She's a little shy, of course, but wait till you know her really! I am grateful to you for receiving her so kindly. She finds you very sympathetic—she is very much taken with you. I hope you will be friends.

CLARA.

These things can't be done to order, Davie.

DAVID.

No, no, of course not—but you'll do what you can—for my sake—won't you, Clara?

CLARA.

[*In the same placid, colourless tone.*] But what difference can it make to you whether we are friends or not ?

DAVID.

[*Not without some embarrassment.*] Only that I would—er—like her to—er—feel free to come here—occasionally. You see, I don't intend to go there—quite so much—in future.

CLARA.

[*Quietly.*] Why not, Davie ? Has her husband said anything ?

DAVID.

[*Turning away and forcing a laugh.*] Good Heavens—what an idea ! . . . But it doesn't seem—quite the right thing—for me to be—er—always going there—and she never to visit us—does it ? [*He turns and goes breezily to CLARA.*] How well you look in that dress, Clara ! It's my favourite. I'm glad you put it on to-day. . . . I hope the youngsters are good.

CLARA.

[*Her voice becoming more and more placid.*] So you want her to come here as often as you used to go there, Davie ?

DAVID.

[Taken aback.] I—oh—as to that—I want you two to be friends—I should like her to be one of us, that's all. . . . She has helped me so much, Clara—and there's this new book of mine. . . .

CLARA.

Yes.

DAVID.

You must think it mean of me not to have read it to you, or spoken very much about it. . . . but I have been so afraid that you mightn't like it—because it's all new, you see. You've been wonderfully kind and good, dear—the best little wife a man ever had!

[He bends over her, puts his arms round her and kisses her lightly on the brow.

CLARA.

[Unmoved.] Then what do you want me to do, Davie?

DAVID.

[Going from her.] Do—er—she'll ask you to call—and so on, and so on. . . . They're coming back . . .

And here's Hannah with the tea. I'm ever so grateful to you, Clara !

[*Mrs. HOLLESDAILE and GABRIELLE, whose voices have been audible outside, come in simultaneously with HANNAH, who looks red and flustered, and brings in the tea-things, which she places on the table in front of CLARA; and then goes. Mrs. HOLLESDAILE looks very pleased; she stands by GABRIELLE'S side as the latter goes to CLARA.*

GABRIELLE.

I'm in love with your children, Mrs. Hollesdaile !

CLARA.

I hope they were not troublesome . . . Do you take milk and sugar ?

GABRIELLE.

Please. [*She sits in her former seat. Mrs. HOLLES-DAILE seats herself by the side of CLARA; DAVID remains standing.*] I asked little Bobby what he meant to be when he grew up. "An engine-driver," said Bobby. "Why?" I asked. "Because he can make as much noise as he likes," says Bobby.

[*They laugh—CLARA smiles politely.*

DAVID.

Enforced silence weighs heavy on his turbulent little soul !

[*He hands tea to GABRIELLE.*

GABRIELLE.

Thank you. [To CLARA.] Baby climbed on my knee at once. I was proud. But I unfortunately addressed her as "Baby." She replied haughtily, "I am Mary Angela 'Ollesdaile." And Bobby promptly thumped her on the back for omitting the aspirate !

DAVID.

[*Merrily.*] The little man's a great stickler for correctness ! Mother's beaming ! You've won her heart by praising the children !

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Mrs. Molyneux seemed so happy with them !

GABRIELLE.

I think your children are delightful, Mrs. Hollesdaile.

CLARA.

. . . I am glad you like them.

GABRIELLE.

Bobby has promised to call on me—will you bring him when you come?

CLARA.

[*Clattering the teacups.*] I—[she mutters something inaudible.]

GABRIELLE.

I won't ask you to my At Homes—they are the stupidest functions—hundreds of people boring themselves and each other—

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

You are not fond of society?

GABRIELLE.

Our miscellaneous gatherings can scarcely be called society. You see, my husband has suddenly become very rich—and he is in a great hurry. I often believe that the guests must have been secured at the same time as the furniture.

DAVID.

[*Laughing.*] Which is magnificently imposing!

GABRIELLE.

The house was decorated—that is the term, I believe—by a fashionable upholsterer. But I have

one little room of my own, which I furnished myself—it is there I shall hope to welcome you both. [To MRS. HOLLESDAILE.] For I may count on you too, may I not?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

If you really want an old woman!

GABRIELLE.

Your smile is younger than mine. . . . When will you come?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Nodding to CLARA.*] Clara?

CLARA.

[*Nervously.*] I . . . I . . . go out—so seldom . . .

GABRIELLE.

You will make an exception for me, will you not?

CLARA.

[*With an effort.*] Yes—I will call—if you wish it.

DAVID.

[*Unconsciously heaving a huge sigh of relief.*] Yes—and take little Bobby! He'll fancy himself in the Crystal Palace! To-morrow, Clara?

CLARA.

To-morrow I cannot.

GABRIELLE.

Any afternoon, Mrs. Hollesdale. You will always find me in. I am an idle and useless woman.

DAVID.

[*Breezily.*] A base slander! Clara knows! I have told her so much of you!

CLARA.

Yes.

DAVID.

You two must be friends.

GABRIELLE.

[*Simply, to CLARA.*] Will you?

CLARA.

[*In low, steady tones.*] I am afraid we have not much in common, Mrs. Molyneux.

GABRIELLE.

[*Lightly.*] One never can tell. Let us start without prejudice. I believe I can be a good friend.

DAVID.

The best in the world! And Clara——

CLARA.

[*Interrupting him, and with a curious ring in her voice.*] Is a very submissive wife.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Alarmed.*] My dear——

CLARA.

[*Pushing away MRS. HOLLESDAILE'S restraining hand, and looking straight at GABRIELLE.*] I am expressing my husband's wishes, Mrs. Molyneux, when I tell you that this house is open to you at any time.

GABRIELLE.

. . . When you have called on me . . .

CLARA.

Please do not wait for that.

DAVID.

[*With an angry movement towards her.*] Clara!

CLARA.

My husband has been seeing you every day; and

now that he is no longer allowed to call at your house—

DAVID.

[Beside himself.] Clara, Clara!

[GABRIELLE rises, as does MRS. HOLLESDAILE, who in vain has been nudging and whispering to CLARA.

CLARA.

[Rising, still nervously clutching the teacup in her hand]—it is only natural that you should want to come here.

GABRIELLE.

[Very quietly.] I do not want to come here, dear Mrs. Hollesdaile. . . . Your husband's friendship has meant a great deal to me—but it is now at an end.

DAVID.

[Passionately.] No, no! [To GABRIELLE.] My wife is a little—hysterical—to-day. I beg you to excuse her. She will write—

CLARA.

[Completely breaking down, and losing all control.] I will not! [She moves to GABRIELLE till she is almost face to face with her.] You have been

trying to take him from me! I have seen it, watched it!

[She bursts into a violent fit of hysterical weeping, lets her teacup fall with a crash on the floor, and rushes wildly from the room, followed by MRS. HOLLESDAILE, wringing her hands. DAVID stamps to and fro, cursing under his breath; GABRIELLE heaves a gentle sigh, and watches him.]

GABRIELLE.

[*Softly.*] It was wrong, you see . . . as I feared.
[DAVID groans.] She must have suffered a great deal.
It is we who are to blame.

DAVID.

Yesterday your husband—my wife to-day!

GABRIELLE.

Do not speak of them in the same breath.

DAVID.

How can I apologise to you?

GABRIELLE.

There is no need. And perhaps she is right.

DAVID.

It is maddening! What can we do?

GABRIELLE.

Submit. You have your work.

DAVID.

I cannot work without you.

GABRIELLE.

You can and you must. How strange it all is!
Human nature of course—but how strange!

DAVID.

The question is what can we do?

GABRIELLE.

[*As she buttons her cloak.*] Regret—that we opened
the book again—that we closed yesterday—for ever!
Good-bye—

DAVID.

[*Ignoring her hand.*] My wife will of course repent
in an hour—

GABRIELLE.

Or a year—or ten years—or a hundred. But
nothing can alter things now.

DAVID.

Why not? If she—

GABRIELLE.

Good-bye. I don't ask you to forget me. But good-bye.

DAVID.

[*Seizing her hand.*] I must see you, meet you somewhere. I must.

GABRIELLE.

[*Freeing herself.*] No—no—no!

[*Mrs. HOLLESDAILE enters quickly from the inner room; she is in a state of pitiable excitement and distress.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Davie, Davie, I can't bring her to! Come quickly! [DAVID starts, and mechanically goes to the door, followed by MRS. HOLLESDAILE. When he has passed through she pauses, closes the door, and returns to GABRIELLE.] Oh, my dear, my dear, why have you done this?

GABRIELLE.

[*Very gently.*] Thoughtlessness only. . . . My life was so unhappy!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

And now?

GABRIELLE.

We will never meet again.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Or write?

GABRIELLE.

. . . Write?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

He loves you—he loves you! Don't you see that?

GABRIELLE.

[*Shrinking.*] No—no—

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

He loves you! Oh, my dear, what have you done?

GABRIELLE.

[*Deeply moved at her distress.*] Try to forgive me. . . . I promise. . . . Never . . . Tell him. . . .

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Thank you! Thank you!

GABRIELLE.

[*Moving to the door at the back.*] Good-bye.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Going with her.*] Good-bye, my dear—and God bless you!

[*She kisses her impulsively; GABRIELLE goes; Mrs. HOLLESDAILE walks quickly across the room to the opposite door, which opens violently, and DAVID rushes in.*

DAVID.

[*Passionately.*] Is she gone?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Has Clara come to?

DAVID.

Yes—I will—

[*He makes a gesture as though to rush after GABRIELLE; Mrs. HOLLESDAILE stops him.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

My son, my son, you must come with me to your wife. . . .

[*DAVID makes a violent movement; she seizes his hand; for a moment they stand looking into each other's eyes; he allows her to lead him out of the room as the curtain slowly falls.*

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE I

DAVID's *study*. *It is late evening ; the lamps are lit ; a faint light comes from the top window, the blind of which is drawn.* DAVID is sitting at his desk, lost in thought, his head buried in his hands. The desk is open before him, and strewn with sheets of manuscript paper. MRS. HOLLESDAILE enters gently from the inner rooms. She has her hat and mantle on. As DAVID hears the door open, he sits up, and pretends to be working.

DAVID.

Ah, mother—are you going?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Yes, dear. Don't let me disturb you . . . Good-night.

DAVID.

Good-night.

[MRS. HOLLESDAILE *opens the door at the back, but pauses on the landing, and returns.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Oh, Davie, by the way, Clara's quite well enough now to go to Folkestone.

DAVID.

[*Absently.*] That's right.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

All this week, when she's been driving out with me, I've seen her getting stronger every day.

DAVID.

Yes . . . the doctor told me yesterday that he wouldn't come any more.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

There really is no need. When do you think of going?

DAVID.

[*Surprised.*] I?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I have arranged with Clara that father and I will live here while you are away and look after the children.

DAVID.

But, my dear mother, why on earth should *I* go?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Perplexed.*] I thought that you — didn't you intend —

DAVID.

I must try to do some work. And it will be much pleasanter for Clara to have the children with her.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Sorrowfully.*] Oh, Davie!

DAVID.

[*With a touch of nervousness.*] Come, come, mother, be sensible. Poor Clara has been very ill—she's all right again now, and the doctor recommends a month at the seaside. But I can't work in a Folkestone boarding-house!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Of course if you won't, Davie —

DAVID.

How can I ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

But I think it rather unkind . . .

[DAVID pushes his papers from him and rises impatiently.]

DAVID.

[With forced calmness.] My dear mother, I have done all I could for Clara during her illness, have I not ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Of course you have.

DAVID.

The first few days—when she was so feverish and hysterical—I never left her side. I tried my utmost to soothe and comfort her. I have not uttered one word of reproach—

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I hope you never will . . .

DAVID.

Or even alluded to—that awful afternoon. But all this time, though I have eaten and drunk and had

a steady pulse, I have been ill, too—very ill; and have not yet recovered . . . I wanted you to know, mother.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Uncomfortably.*] You have been working, Davie—

DAVID.

Every evening I have torn up what I wrote in the daytime.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

. . . I am sorry . . .

DAVID.

You and I have never spoken about this thing—since it happened. It is time, perhaps, that we should. It is right that you should know. There is no oil in my brain, mother. During these last three weeks I have not written a single line.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Of course Clara's illness will have—And that's why I think it would do you good to go away. And, besides—if you don't go, it will wound her.

DAVID.

Am I to spend the rest of my life trying not to wound Clara?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Your wife, Davie !

DAVID.

My wife, yes. [*He moves down the room.*] The fact is, I should never have married.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Davie !

DAVID.

That shocks you. But don't you see how difficult it is to reconcile the two ?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Which two ?

DAVID.

The duty to my wife and the duty to my work.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

They are not antagonistic.

DAVID.

It happens unfortunately that they are. [*He comes back to her.*] It is different with father, you see. His wife and his child—that's all he has lived for. He goes to his office and comes back. That fills his life.

But my clear duty is to do the best work I can with my brain.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

And your wife and children will help you.

DAVID.

I need Gabrielle.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Rising in alarm.*] Davie, Davie !

DAVID.

I need Gabrielle, [There is a moment's silence. MRS. HOLLESDAILE resumes her seat, exceedingly distressed.] I have written to her but she has not answered. [MRS. HOLLESDAILE looks down, but says nothing.] She is evidently waiting till she hears from Clara. [MRS. HOLLESDAILE still remains silent.] And how long is this to go on ? See—[he takes up a roll of MS.]—it is waiting ! Not a line added !

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[With an effort.] You must not make your wife unhappy. I have read the lives of some of the greatest of men—

DAVID.

They were probably written by their sons. When Froude told the truth about Carlyle, people shrieked. Was it not better that Mrs. Carlyle should have cried sometimes—or should he have spared her those tears and become a linen-draper?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

He might have done greater work still if he had been less cruel to his wife.

DAVID.

[*Scarcely heeding her, and with a ring of deep earnestness in his voice.*] Mother, I am honest. I don't seek fame. I have had more of that than I merit. I merely want to do my duty.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Davie, Davie, do the one that lies nearest!

DAVID.

I don't pretend that any work of mine will live. But I have something to say—that I must say—that is I—myself—I feel it here—[he taps his forehead]. And for that I need Gabrielle.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I think that weak of you—yes, weak, I do! Can't you speak out what is in you without the help of this woman?

DAVID.

In the life of every man who struggles to express himself there is a woman other than his wife.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Stoutly.*] I don't believe it!

DAVID.

Why not? One's wife is a part of oneself. We love her, and all is said. The other woman brings brain, soul, sympathy. In me there is something locked—and Gabrielle holds the key. I must see her—must!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Oh, I have long been feeling that all this is a punishment for my ambition! I wanted you to be a great man—it is worth more, perhaps, to be a good one!

DAVID.

What have I done that was wrong?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Excitedly.*] You know well enough that there can be no friendship between a man and a woman !

DAVID.

That sounds simply monstrous to me. See what you do, you good people ! You fling us headlong to the devil. [*Silence. He walks to and fro.*] No friendship possible. Yes—that is the cry of the world. Very well then—I will speak to Clara.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Don't, Davie, don't ! Do what is right ! Oh believe me—

DAVID.

No friendship possible . . . That's the way with them all. One has only to be negative to be praised. If I crush what is best in me they'll call me good. And old ladies will weep as they read my biography, and say "His life was pure !"

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Rises, and lays a gentle hand on his.*] Davie—dear Davie—

DAVID.

[*Releasing himself impatiently.*] Don't. Don't say

anything more. There is something of the woman in me, too. I could cry, and be hysterical. I could shed more tears than have ever fallen from a woman's eyes. For this thing—this book of mine—was to be my first-born, the supreme expression of the force that is in me—the self that eludes me. . . . And it will never be born—my wife has come in—and strangled it!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Indignantly.*] This is wicked!

DAVID.

Perhaps! You make me wicked between you. You have had no faith! There is revolt in me, mother . . . You put thoughts into my head that never were there before. . . .

[*He goes to his desk, and sits down. Mrs. Hollesdale remains standing, not knowing what to say.*

DAVID.

[*Playing feverishly with his papers.*] Married! I am married—married!

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Clara's coming . . .

[*CLARA enters slowly from the inner room. She*

is brightly dressed and looks well and cheerful. She goes to DAVID and kisses him.

CLARA.

I heard voices, Davie dear, or I wouldn't have disturbed you.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

I must be off. Don't stop up too late, Clara. Dear me—it's nearly ten. Good-bye.

CLARA.

Good-bye, mother. [*She kisses her.*] You'll come to-morrow?

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

Yes—early. Good-bye, Davie.

DAVID.

[*Without rising.*] Good-bye, mother.

[*MRS. HOLLESDAILE goes to him and kisses him.*

MRS. HOLLESDAILE.

[*Whispering in his ear.*] My boy will do nothing unkind?

DAVID.

[With an attempt at cheerfulness.] You've clipped my wings! Good-night.

[He rises, goes to the door, and holds it open.

MRS. HOLLESDAILE kisses CLARA again, very tenderly and affectionately, and goes. DAVID stands for an instant looking after her; the street door is heard to shut; he closes the door, returns to his desk, and sits down. CLARA seats herself in an armchair at back.

CLARA.

You've been working, Davie?

DAVID.

A little.

CLARA.

You can't read anything to me yet?

DAVID.

No—not yet.

CLARA.

But you will?

DAVID.

Oh yes—by-and-by.

[A pause.

CLARA.

Has mother spoken to you about our going away?

DAVID.

[Without looking up.] I don't think I can go, Clara.

CLARA.

[Disappointed.] No?

DAVID.

The fact is I have not been working very well. . . .
Of course, while you were ill—

CLARA.

[Eagerly.] I don't mind staying here, Davie. . I am quite well now. I really feel better than I have felt for years.

DAVID.

I am glad of that. [He rises and goes towards her.] Do you know, I am wondering whether this illness of yours will not . . . perhaps . . . have drawn us the closer together. . . .

CLARA.

I am sure of it, Davie! You have been so good to me!

DAVID.

And it may be that, in the future, we shall understand each other better. . . .

CLARA.

[*Tenderly, yet half timidly.*] I shall never forget how you gave up everything for me.

DAVID.

[*With a trace of effort.*] At least you know now . . . what my feeling for you is . . . and that you wronged me . . . by your suspicions. . . .

CLARA.

I thought you didn't care for me any more. . . .

DAVID.

[*Cheerfully.*] Foolish girl! . . . You *have* been—just a little—haven't you?

CLARA.

[*Tenderly.*] When a woman loves her husband as I do!

[DAVID kisses her, and sits on the arm of her chair.

DAVID.

[With an endeavour at playfulness.] You were jealous.

CLARA.

Yes. . . .

DAVID.

Isn't that strange? And you never told me!

CLARA.

. . . I feel that I should have trusted you more.

DAVID.

[Eagerly.] Yes—that is what we need—trust, faith! But you see now that you were wrong, dear, don't you?

CLARA.

. . . I wasn't wrong about her, Davie. . . .

[DAVID rises angrily and crosses the room.

DAVID.

[Sitting at his desk.] What do you mean?

CLARA.

[Contritely.] I would rather not speak of—

DAVID.

[*Coldly.*] On the contrary, it is better that we should . . . speak this thing out. Tell me what you mean.

CLARA.

It won't make you angry ?

DAVID.

I have never said a word about . . . that afternoon, Clara. . . . But now that you are well again, and strong, I should at least like to know why . . . why . . . you think that you were not wrong.

CLARA.

About her, I said, Davie.

DAVID.

About her, yes. Why ?

CLARA.

[*Bravely.*] Because she is a bad woman, Davie. [DAVID makes a movement, which he represses.] She is not sincere, or loyal. She had no right to offer me her friendship. It was true when I told her that she had been trying to take you from me. [DAVID is about to speak, but he stifles the remark on his lips, and walks

to the window, where he stands with his back turned to CLARA.] It wasn't your having a woman friend that I objected to. There are many that I would have been glad for you to—

DAVID.

[*Without turning, bitterly.*] Like Mary Adlington, or Hannah Dobree, for instance.

CLARA.

They may not be handsome, but they are good women, Davie.

DAVID.

[*Facing her.*] And Mrs. Molyneux is not?

CLARA.

No. I am sure she isn't.

DAVID.

You saw her for ten minutes.

CLARA.

It doesn't take a woman long to understand another woman. And I had read her letters.

DAVID.

What! The letters she wrote to me!

CLARA.

[*Penitently, with downcast eyes.*] Yes. . . . It was mean, I know. But I was so unhappy—and jealous. And whenever you missed seeing her for a day, there came a letter.

DAVID.

You actually went over my desk and——

CLARA.

Yes. You must forgive me. I used to see you waiting so eagerly for the post—and then hiding the letter, to read it when you were alone. It was she kept on writing to you—from the start!

DAVID.

[*Almost defiantly.*] At any rate, there was nothing in those letters——

CLARA.

They were not the sort a good woman would write to another woman's husband. . . . Oh, Davie, don't be angry with me! You made me tell you!

DAVID.

[*With enforced composure.*] I know Mrs. Molyneux better than you do, Clara.

CLARA.

She is so handsome. . . .

DAVID.

Then it is quite impossible for you ever to——

CLARA.

[*Mournfully.*] Oh Davie, Davie. . . . And I was just beginning to be happy !

DAVID.

All I want you to do is to write—say one word—to tell her you're sorry——

CLARA.

And ask her to come here ?

DAVID.

Why not ? Now that you know——

CLARA.

[*Tearfully.*] I can't do it, Davie ! I can't !

DAVID.

Not now, perhaps—but in a week—a month—
[CLARA shakes her head.] I don't for a moment suppose that she'd come, but——

CLARA.

[Rising, with sudden feverish energy.] Oh yes—she would—she'd come! I'll do anything in the world for you, Davie—but not that! Don't ask it of me!

DAVID.

You know that I can't work; that I haven't written a line these past three weeks—that I need her for this book of mine—

CLARA.

[Throwing her arms about him.] Come away with me, Davie!

DAVID.

[Coldly, unclasping her arms.] Your jealousy demands a great sacrifice of me, Clara. . . .

CLARA.

[Sinking into a chair, and bursting into tears.] She's a bad woman—a bad woman! *[DAVID sits at his desk, and makes a show of being about to write. CLARA dries her eyes, rises, and goes to him, standing by the side of his desk.]* All the time that you went there—I said nothing. . . . And when you told me of her coming here—I intended . . . to be resigned—to take second place—to be satisfied with looking after

your house and your children. But I couldn't My heart was bursting—my poor heart spoke out the truth—then as now !

DAVID.

[*Dipping his pen in the ink.*] The heart often leads us astray—I was appealing to your reason.

CLARA.

Oh Davie, Davie, it is the heart that is the best guide for us women ! . . . There is no sacrifice in the world I wouldn't cheerfully make for you—

DAVID.

[*Pretending to write.*] Except the very trifling one I happen to ask. . . . Very well, then ; let us say no more about it.

[*Silence ; CLARA stands unhappily before him ; he scribbles on his blotting pad.*

CLARA.

You won't go away with me ?

DAVID.

No.

CLARA.

Don't you think it would do you good ?

DAVID.

Why should it ?

[He goes on writing ; CLARA pauses for an instant ; then goes impulsively to him and flings her arms around him.]

CLARA.

Oh Davie—you won't hate me for this ?

DAVID.

[Quietly.] Don't be absurd, Clara. . . . And I really must do some work.

CLARA.

I'll go to bed. . . . *[She kisses him again.]* Oh my dear, dear husband, remember that your poor wife loves you !

[She is on the point of breaking down, but restrains herself, releases him, and goes out quickly. As soon as the door is closed, DAVID flings down his pen, takes a violent turn up and down the room, sits, fills and lights his pipe, muttering to himself. He takes GABRIELLE'S photograph from the drawer, looks at it, heaves a deep sigh, shrugs his shoulders, puts it back, dips his

pen in the ink, brings it out, and holds it poised in the air. He dips it in again and again, lost in thought; then sighs once more, puts the pen down, takes up a sheet and proceeds to read it. He suddenly tears up the sheet in a violent access of passion, hurls the pieces across the room and starts to his feet. An idea has flashed across him of which he seems almost afraid; he looks nervously around—pauses—decides—then, moving on tiptoe, he goes to the alcove, takes down his hat and coat and a small black bag; returns stealthily to his desk, opens a secret drawer, takes out a revolver, into the barrels of which he looks for an instant, then lays it in the bag; seizes his roll of manuscript, GABRIELLE'S photograph, and crams them in too. After an instant's pause, acting all the while as though walking in his sleep, he sits and scrawls two lines on a sheet of note-paper, which he puts in an envelope, addresses, and lays on the mantelpiece; then, putting on his hat, throwing the overcoat over his arm, and carrying the bag, he goes noiselessly round the room and extinguishes the standard

lamps in the corners ; the moon shines full on him through the toplight. He opens the door gently, pauses for an instant, gives one more look round, then goes. The hall door is heard to shut gently, and the curtain falls.

SCENE II

The drawing-room at MRS. MOLYNEUX's. It is late evening ; the room is brilliantly illuminated by countless electric lights. GABRIELLE is playing chess with the GENERAL. He is pondering his move ; she is leaning back in her chair, her thoughts far away. The GENERAL makes his move ; GABRIELLE takes no notice.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I have moved.

GABRIELLE.

[*Bending forward.*] Ah—what did you do ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I moved the bishop. [*He touches the piece. GABRIELLE surveys the board for an instant, then plays.*] I am attacking your rook.

GABRIELLE.

That's true. [*She takes her move back, and listlessly advances another piece.*]

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You expose your king, my dear.

GABRIELLE.

Oh! . . . [*She restores the piece to its place, and pushes forward another.*]

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Looking up.*] I am afraid your mind is not on the game?

GABRIELLE.

[*Meekly.*] No, uncle.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Don't you care for chess?

GABRIELLE.

I hate it.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Then why did you suggest a game?

GABRIELLE.

It seemed a less mournful way of spending the evening.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You are not in good spirits to-night. . . .

GABRIELLE.

[*Leaning back in her chair.*] No. . . . I ought to be, I know. I have everything to make me happy. But—[*she bends forward and threatens him playfully*]
if you lecture me this evening I'll throw the chessmen at you!

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Why should I lecture you ?

GABRIELLE.

Your eyebrows were looking didactic.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Rising.*] I am far more inclined to say a few severe words to myself.

GABRIELLE.

Yes; let's play at that—for a change.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I mean it, Gabrielle. . . . It has more than once occurred to me lately, that an old man is not necessarily a wise one. I make the confession meekly.

[*He bends his old head before her; GABRIELLE rises and throws her arms round his neck.*

GABRIELLE.

Why don't you take me away and let me live with you?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

You know that I haven't a penny besides my pension; and half of that goes to my brother. . . .

GABRIELLE.

We could live on so little! I would cook and scrub—

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

And when I die?

GABRIELLE.

I might die before you.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Stroking her hair.*] My poor little girl.

GABRIELLE.

[*Going back to her chair.*] I suppose we're too old to do turns in a music-hall?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*With a smile.*] I'm afraid we are.

GABRIELLE.

You couldn't be a strong man and stand on your head and toss me round in the air ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

My joints are a trifle stiff. . . .

GABRIELLE.

I'm sorry. It seems the only profession open for a lady.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Where's Mrs. Mellissent to-night ?

GABRIELLE.

Dining somewhere. It seems dull without her, doesn't it ? She *has* been good to me ! [She looks around.] It's this room, I think, that depresses me.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

Yes, by the way—why are we not in the boudoir ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Toying with the chessmen.*] Mr. Molyneux has thrown it into the billiard-room.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Violently.*] No !

GABRIELLE.

It is his house. He speaks vaguely of a room upstairs for me.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

The blackguard ! Why didn't you tell me ?

GABRIELLE.

He says no one uses the drawing-rooms except on our At Home days.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

[*Holding out his hand.*] Good-bye, my dear.

GABRIELLE.

Are you going ?

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I want to be outside—and swear. I'll speak to him to-morrow.

GABRIELLE.

He will only smile.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

I would like to knock his—head off !

GABRIELLE.

It would still smile.

GENERAL WILLIAMS.

It's nearly eleven. Good-bye, Gabrielle. . . .

[*He kisses her very tenderly.*

GABRIELLE.

Good-bye, uncle.

[*The GENERAL goes ; he is immediately heard talking outside with MRS. MELLISSENT, who comes in, clad in resplendent evening dress.*

GABRIELLE.

[*Rising joyfully, and going towards her with outstretched hands.*] Alice !

[MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'm not too late ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Kissing her.*] As if you could be ! What a brilliant idea ! And your dinner ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

It was only two doors off. A South African function. The sort of house where the young ladies ask the men they are introduced to, "Are you in diamonds or gold-mines ? "

GABRIELLE.

[*Smiling.*] What makes you go to such a place?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Sitting.*] Business, my dear, business. I have evolved a great scheme.

GABRIELLE.

[*Sitting beside her.*] What is it?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Something to do with ladies' tea-shops, and bonnets, and gloves, and scents, and culture, and theatre-tickets, all thrown in and wonderfully jumbled! But the idea's superb—with a fortune waiting! Managing directress, Alice Mellissent! All I need is the capital.

GABRIELLE.

And have you found it?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I think I've found the man.

GABRIELLE.

To-night?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Yes. He says I'm a "vonderful woman," which, of course, I am.

GABRIELLE.

Who is he ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Complacently.*] He is a great many swindles, several gold-mines, and, I am told, a theatre.

GABRIELLE.

With a leading lady ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Of course.

GABRIELLE.

Can she act ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Not on the stage ; but if she makes him believe that she loves him !

GABRIELLE.

What is he like ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Very damp and shockingly greasy, with a wobbly meandering nose.

GABRIELLE.

Rich, of course ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Millions. Sovereigns and banknotes roll from him ; you feel inclined to pick up his aitches.

GABRIELLE.

Do you think he is—quite the sort of person—for you to be associated with, Alice ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I have a daughter to provide for. She shan't be a free lance like her mother, if I can help it.

GABRIELLE.

I am afraid people will talk. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

They began to do that a month after my husband died, leaving me a baby and a Saratoga trunk.

GABRIELLE.

Poor Alice ! You've had a hard fight, I know. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

It braces the nerves. I sleep like a top on a pillow that's stuffed full of bills. And I've managed to bring up the infant.

GABRIELLE.

She's a sweet little girl.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

She is, isn't she? My dear, I could die happy to-morrow if I could leave that child two hundred a year! . . . You see I have to dress well to earn a living. And that's enough about me. How are you?

GABRIELLE.

Bored.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Still?

GABRIELLE.

So bored to-day that I feel yesterday must have been happiness. To-morrow I shall envy to-day.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

What my little girl calls the hump.

GABRIELLE.

Yes; but my backbone's going!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Suppose you brought it to me for a couple of days?

GABRIELLE.

I'm dull company, Alice.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'll play David to your Saul—it was Saul, wasn't it?—and charm the dulness away.

GABRIELLE.

Shan't I be putting you out? Have you room?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

The child has gone back to school—and besides, my flat is elastic—like my landlord's patience.

GABRIELLE.

It's very good of you, Alice.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

We'll rail at mankind together and drink tea at all hours. Come to-night—why not? At once? You'll have some one to talk to at breakfast.

GABRIELLE.

I can't resist that. I will!

[*She rings.*

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And if I've nightmare, and dream of my oleaginous Kaffir, I'll run in to you.

[*FOOTMAN comes in.*

GABRIELLE.

Tell Toplis to bring my hat and cloak, and pack my bag for two days. And please call a hansom.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, madam.

[He retires.]

MRS. MELLISSENT.

We must find you something to do, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE.

There's nothing I'm fit for. I've tried slumming, but I haven't the gift.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Can't you read?

GABRIELLE.

I do; but the novelists write of love, and the philosophers of patience.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

They make a fascinating sandwich—but one hankers after the forbidden mustard. . . . Have you had any more letters from—

GABRIELLE.

No. He has forgotten my very existence, I hope, by this time.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

What a little Turk, that wife of his! She has him safe, now, in her harem. Why are good women so stupid?

GABRIELLE.

It's a weary world.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Full of 'buses, policemen, and perambulators.

GABRIELLE.

There's something to be said for those primitive societies where a man seizes you by your back hair, clubs you on the head, and drags you to his cave. At least you haven't to think!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[With a chuckle.] But the neighbours would talk. . . .

GABRIELLE.

He'd club them on the head, too.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

That wouldn't hurt the heads of the gossips, my dear. I'm [not a vindictive person, but I do hope there's a nice little Hell, with lots of blackbeetles, where the sniffy women will go to.

GABRIELLE.

Virtue and all !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

But they'd soon be whispering down there that
Mrs. So-and-So was far too intimate with the Devil !

GABRIELLE.

I wonder, sometimes, whether we women don't
pay too dear a price for our virtue.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And yet compare the salaries of the housemaid and
the opera dancer !

GABRIELLE.

I'm not joking, Alice. [*She rises.*] I married when
I was nineteen. And I've lived two eternities since.
A stagnant woman. For what ?

MRS. MELLISSENT

[*Mildly.*] My dear. . . .

GABRIELLE.

Oh, with you it's different. You have a daughter.
[*With sudden passion.*] I tell you, if any decent man
were to say to me to-night "Come with me" I would
follow him—to the ends of the earth !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Rising, almost in alarm.*] Gabrielle! I have never heard you speak like this!

GABRIELLE.

I have never been so utterly weary. I cannot feed much longer on the stale rind of life.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

You make me anxious.

GABRIELLE.

There is no need. It is only talk. I am a coward. But I want to do something worth doing—I want to live!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Very earnestly.*] Do you know what has helped me, more than anything else in the world, to lead a decent life all these years? . . . The thought of you, and your example, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE.

[*Kissing her.*] I am very discouraged to-night, and unhappier than it is right that a woman should be.

We need some one to live for, pray for—then we can struggle. . . . But you needn't be frightened. . . .

[TOPLIS *comes in carrying a hat and cloak, which she helps GABRIELLE to put on.*

TOPLIS.

The bag is in the hall, madam.

GABRIELLE.

Thank you. You will tell Mr. Molyneux that I am staying with Mrs. Mellissent for a couple of days.

TOPLIS.

Yes, madam.

[*She retires.*

GABRIELLE.

Come.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'm ready. Oh, by the way, that wretched Lady Patterson has invited herself to lunch with me to-morrow. I must put her off. I had better write a line here—we can post it on our way.

GABRIELLE.

[*Throwing open a writing-desk.*] I'm always out when she calls.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Sitting at the desk.*] I'm unfortunately too poor to select my acquaintances. She's the first person I'll be rude to when I'm rich. Have you any plain paper?

GABRIELLE.

[*Pointing to a drawer.*] Here.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I shan't be a minute. Let's see—what excuse shall I make?—My husband's rich uncle—that will do—I've given him a useful gout, which is more than he has ever given me, or will. [*She writes, but suddenly looks up and listens.*] Dear me, is that rain?

GABRIELLE.

[*Walking to the French window.*] The wind in the trees, I think.

[*She pulls back the curtains, and throws open the window.* DAVID stands revealed, crouching in the verandah. GABRIELLE gives a violent start, closes the window and returns to MRS. MELLISSENT.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Writing.*] Is it rain?

GABRIELLE.

[*Unsteadily.*] No.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'm glad—I've my best frock on. [*She folds up her letter and puts it in an envelope.*] That's done. Have you a stamp? [*GABRIELLE gives her one.*] Thanks.—She'll think it a lie, of course, but she thinks that, whatever you tell her. Let's go.

GABRIELLE.

Do you know, Alice, I think I had better wait till to-morrow.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Nonsense, nonsense, come on. Why, how pale you are!

GABRIELLE.

A sudden twinge of pain.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'm so so sorry. I'll stay here with you.

GABRIELLE.

No, dear—I'm best left alone.

[*She walks to the door and rings.*

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Sure? No one waits up for me——

GABRIELLE.

Quite sure, dear. Thanks, all the same.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Well, take care of yourself. Have you anything to make you sleep?

GABRIELLE.

Every nostrum under the sun—and yet I lie awake!

[A FOOTMAN enters.] Is the cab there?

FOOTMAN.

Yes, madam.

GABRIELLE.

See Mrs. Mellissent into it. Good-bye, dear Alice.
[She kisses her—then turning to the FOOTMAN.] Have my bag taken upstairs, and tell Toplis I shall not go till to-morrow.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Good-bye, dear. Sure you're all right?

GABRIELLE.

Oh yes.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

To-morrow ?

GABRIELLE.

Yes,

MRS. MELLISSENT.

As early as you like. I breakfast at eight.

[She waves a smile at GABRIELLE, and goes, with the FOOTMAN. GABRIELLE waits for an instant, then walks to the window, which she throws open. DAVID stands erect, but does not attempt to enter the room. Outside the moon is shining. For a moment they stand silently looking at each other.]

GABRIELLE.

[Quietly.] You should not have done this.

DAVID.

Perhaps. I don't know.

GABRIELLE.

Have you been there long ?

DAVID.

It seemed a long time.

GABRIELLE.

They will have seen you ?

DAVID.

No—I came by the back, and kept in the shadow. I thought you were out; there was no light in the boudoir. Then I heard your voice.

GABRIELLE.

[*Anxiously.*] Could you hear what I said?

DAVID.

No. Why?

GABRIELLE.

You should not have come—but I am glad to have seen you. And now you must go.

DAVID.

Why have you not written?

GABRIELLE.

I promised I would not.

DAVID.

Never?

GABRIELLE.

Yes.

DAVID.

Or see me?

GABRIELLE.

Or see you.

DAVID.

That's what I thought. Well, of course it's impossible.

GABRIELLE.

I'm afraid that it has to be. And you really must not stop any longer. Perhaps in the years to come——

DAVID.

I have left my home, you know. I shall never go back.

GABRIELLE.

[*In absolute dismay.*] What!

DAVID.

There's a train leaves Euston for Glasgow at half past twelve. From Leith there are steamers to France or to Spain.

GABRIELLE.

You are going abroad?

DAVID.

If you will come with me.

GABRIELLE.

[*Shrinking in terror.*] Oh!!! Is this what your friendship meant?

DAVID.

No. My friendship was satisfied to see you and hear you. But they will not let us be friends.

GABRIELLE.

[*With a mighty effort at self-control.*] It is true that they have been foolish. But you do not know what you are saying. How can you talk of leaving your wife and your children?

DAVID.

They belong to another world—a world in which I cannot live. There is something in me that starves, and cries out for you. I am a weak man, I know. I can't help it—I haven't the strength. I have fought—I have struggled—I even have tried to pray. . . . I need you.

GABRIELLE.

Don't say such terrible things—you must not, you must not!

DAVID.

I think of you by day and by night. You have let me look into your soul; you have woven yourself

around mine. . . But I thought that you would not. . . Well, here is the book. [*He takes the MS. from the bag and offers it to her.*] There has been nothing added.

GABRIELLE.

Why give it to me?

DAVID.

It belongs to you, and will never be finished. Good-bye—won't you take it?

GABRIELLE.

Not finished? What do you mean?

DAVID.

Don't you see that I cannot live?

GABRIELLE.

Not live! Not live! What!

[*She cowers to the wall in absolute terror.*

DAVID.

How can I live? They talk of the future; my feet are too sore, my heart is too heavy, I never can reach it. These three weeks I scarcely have slept: I cannot endure it. I spoke to them to-night: they drown me with words. My God, Gabrielle, I need you!

GABRIELLE.

Hush—hush—you have your work——

DAVID.

You were my work; when you went, my brain stopped. And now it is onwards with you—or an end.

GABRIELLE.

A suicide—you! Oh I cannot believe it!

DAVID.

I should not have told you—I had not intended——

GABRIELLE.

[*With both hands to her head.*] Oh what have I done!
I have broken his life!

DAVID.

You have shown me what life can be made! And why not come with me? You have only your uncle—he is an old man; old men should have pity.

GABRIELLE.

[*With a supreme effort at calm and self-control.*] Come in; we are safer inside. We must talk, we two, like sensible beings. . . .

[*She turns into the room; DAVID follows her.*

GABRIELLE.

[*In tranquil tones.*] Now, my friend, my dear friend—hush!!!! I hear my husband! . . .

[*Her attitude becomes ones of deadly terror; DAVID remains unmoved. Heavy footsteps are heard in the corridor outside; they approach the door, pause, then pass on; and a door is heard to close.*

GABRIELLE.

[*In a feverish whisper.*] He may have heard us; he may come back; go!

DAVID.

[*Turning quietly to the window.*] Yes. Good-bye.

GABRIELLE.

But swear that you will not—

DAVID.

I must.

GABRIELLE.

But why, why?

DAVID.

I cannot live without you.

GABRIELLE.

[*Wailing.*] Oh, have mercy, have mercy!

DAVID.

Come with me!

GABRIELLE.

It would be a crime. . . .

DAVID.

The crime was to part us. . . .

GABRIELLE.

You would kill yourself, you!

DAVID.

I must.

GABRIELLE.

Oh God, oh God!

DAVID.

If this life is worth saving, it is you who must
save it.

GABRIELLE.

[*Clinging to him.*] I beseech you, I beseech you. . .

DAVID.

[Gently releasing himself.] Good-bye.

[He goes quietly through the open French window ; GABRIELLE stands for a moment as though hypnotised, then suddenly crying out, "No, no, come back !" she rushes wildly after him, and disappears outside. In the meanwhile the door on the other side has opened, and MOLYNEUX has made a stealthy appearance in time to see DAVID go out and GABRIELLE follow him, without himself being perceived by either. He walks softly to the window, and closes it. A murmur of voices is heard outside ; and GABRIELLE's and DAVID's footsteps on the gravel. Quick as thought MOLYNEUX slips the bolt in the window, switches off the light, and steps aside. The room is in darkness. GABRIELLE's haggard face is seen in the moonlight, pressed against the glass as her hand tugs feverishly at the handle.]

GABRIELLE.

[In anguish.] Locked !

DAVID.

Come ! [She suffers herself to be led away as the curtain slowly falls.]

CURTAIN.

THE FOURTH ACT

At Piques-Mortes, in Provence. A beautiful garden, laden with roses. The house, a mere cottage, stands to the right ; an open verandah runs round it, and this, as well as the rustic porch, is almost hidden by the roses which have entwined themselves fantastically around wood and masonry. A low hedge runs at the back, over which a wide expanse of smiling country is seen. In the centre there is a little wicket, from which a path winds off to the left, and there is another gate at the right, which leads to the road. Six months have elapsed since the last act ; it is the morning of an exquisite December day, and the sun is shining brightly. GABRIELLE and DAVID are seated at the breakfast-table in the garden ; the meal is just over.

GABRIELLE.

Some more coffee, David ?

DAVID.

No, thank you. Have you finished ?

GABRIELLE.

Yes.

DAVID.

[*Rising, and looking at his watch.*] Half-past nine. . . . I don't suppose they'll be up yet—though I rather expected Hopkinson would have been here.

GABRIELLE.

I saw no sign of him when I went to the inn ; and Alice was still asleep.

DAVID.

I hope the people over there will look after them properly.

GABRIELLE.

It seems quite a nice little place. Of course Alice will take her meals with us.

DAVID.

We must ask Hopkinson to dinner to-day. Poor fellow—what a journey to have made, all for nothing !

GABRIELLE.

It was his fault—you didn't send for him. But how sweet of Alice to have come!

DAVID.

Isn't it strange that he should arrive almost the very day the book was finished?

GABRIELLE.

Yes. . . . I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw them come in last night.

DAVID.

He'll shake his head over me—tell me I'm lost—gone to perdition! Did Mrs. Mellissent say anything?

GABRIELLE.

Poor Alice! No—she was too tired almost to speak. At the inn I just kissed her and put her to bed. She was completely exhausted.

DAVID.

Those six hours by diligence break one's back—and they came straight through!

GABRIELLE.

It's a pity this cottage is so tiny. . . . We really should have a spare room. . . .

DAVID.

We've not been over-run with visitors so far !

GABRIELLE.

[*Looking up.*] Is my lord weary of his solitude ?

DAVID.

[*Taking her hand.*] Weary—ha ! ha ! But I do think—now that we've got this book off our hands—we might go somewhere—where we could see a man in a dress coat—occasionally—through a telescope—eh ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Crumbling her bread.*] We'll go anywhere you please, David. You know that.

[*A peasant girl comes from the house, and prepares to remove the breakfast things.*
GABRIELLE rises, and sits by the porch.

DAVID.

Poor Hopkinson ! When I gave him the MS. last night he tapped me on the shoulder. "Is it good ?" he asked. "Very," said I. "Shall I like it ?" . . . I chuckled. He'll have no more golden eggs from me, I'm afraid !

GABRIELLE.

He only thinks of the money. . . .

DAVID.

I think I'll go round there and fetch him. He's sure to have stopped up all night to read it—or as much of it as he could read. Do you know, I think I will ask Mrs. Mellissent to take charge of the MS.

GABRIELLE.

I'm sure she will, gladly.

DAVID.

I don't like to send it by post—we have only that one copy—

GABRIELLE.

I could make another, if you liked, dear. . . .

DAVID.

I don't think it's necessary, thanks. . . . Macmurdo shall have it. He has asked me so often. . . . I have an idea the book will create something of a stir. . . . No money in it, of course—but we have enough coming in from our royalties. And one has to create his own public.

GABRIELLE.

Yes. . . .

DAVID.

You see, this book is quite different from all I have done. . . . And I've thoughts of the next already simmering in my head—and the one after that. . . . Thank God, I have still something to say!

GABRIELLE.

And you'll say it, David—you'll say it!

DAVID.

This book I have written is the foundation—on which I hope to erect a fair building. . . . I believe it is carefully laid, with honest material. . . . I believe it, at least.

GABRIELLE.

[*Nervously, avoiding his eye.*] Yes. . . .

DAVID.

[*Looking searchingly at her.*] I have had a vague sort of feeling at times that you were not satisfied with it.

GABRIELLE.

[*Guiltily.*] Oh David!

DAVID.

You didn't like my re-writing the part I had written in London—

GABRIELLE.

. . . From sentimental reasons, perhaps. . . .

DAVID.

It was out of value with the rest—didn't you feel that?

GABRIELLE.

Yes. . . .

DAVID.

My mind has been firmer down here—freer, more confident. Before I was timid, and doubtful. [*He looks inquiringly at GABRIELLE; her eyes are still averted.*] I think you are wrong, you know. . . .

GABRIELLE.

[*Looking up.*] Oh David, what makes you imagine that I—

DAVID.

I don't know—it's just an idea. . . . For, you see, in this book, for good or for ill, I've piped out the note that is in me. I've spoken my truth. And by it I stand or I fall. [*He invites a remark from*

GABRIELLE, but she remains silent. He paces excitedly to and fro.] The book is the man, you see. It is there one should look for his thoughts and his dreams—for the springs of his life. Never mind what he *did*; the book tells of what he was trying to do.

GABRIELLE.

Yes.

DAVID.

In his actual life there is circumstance—fate; there are instincts, temptations; there are none of all these in his book. The real God's man is there. Never mind the poor thing in frock-coat and top hat, who struggled and fell, as the rest of us struggle and fall—don't write his poor life—read his thoughts!

GABRIELLE.

[Rising impulsively.] Oh David, you hurt me!

DAVID.

[Startled.] I?

GABRIELLE.

You have spoken like this so often of late . . . as though you regretted . . .

DAVID.

My dear!

GABRIELLE.

It cuts into me like a reproach . . .

DAVID.

I meant none. . . . It's only that the book stands for so much to me. . . . And I've been a little afraid at times. . . .

GABRIELLE.

Afraid?

DAVID.

Lest you may be right. Hush! You're not, I know. . . . But I'm not quite myself to-day. . . .

[Mrs. MELLISSENT has come in unperceived by them through the centre gate. She goes to GABRIELLE and embraces her.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

My dear Gabrielle!

[GABRIELLE lies in her arms for an instant, too emotional to speak.

DAVID.

Good morning, Mrs. Mellissent! You've breakfasted?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Oh yes.

[She holds out a hand to him, the other is still around GABRIELLE.

DAVID.

And how did you sleep ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Like a child. Oh, but I was tired ! When I arrived last night I didn't even care how I looked !

DAVID.

The fact is you were not conversational.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

That diligence ! I paid for a seat, but never sat on it. For six mortal hours I was tossed in the air, occasionally alighting on the laps of two men, to whom I hadn't even been introduced. And one was an aged priest, who shuddered and crossed himself each time that I sat on him !

DAVID.

It's an awful conveyance. A converted farm-waggon.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

That accounts for its hysteria. And that wretched Hopkinson slept through it all !

DAVID.

Have you seen him this morning ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

No. You gave him the book?

DAVID,

Last night—yes. He took it away with him.

GABRIELLE.

[*To Mrs. MELLISSENT.*] Tell us how it all happened, dear.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Three days ago he came to me, biting his nails as usual, and wanted your address. Hadn't had a line from you, he said; going for his holiday; thought he'd run over. Book must be finished by now! Then came the flashing inspiration—to go with him—and surprise you! And here we are—the bumptious publisher and the much bumped lady.

GABRIELLE.

It was very sweet of you, dear. . . .

DAVID.

I'm afraid the poor little man will have no nails left this morning! Do you know, if you will excuse me, I think I'll walk across to the inn. You two won't mind being left together!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'm simply dying for a talk with Gabrielle.

DAVID.

Then I'll go. You lunch with us, of course, and dine? So sorry we can't put you up. [*He feels in his pocket.*] Confound it! I've left my tobacco upstairs!

GABRIELLE.

[*Rising.*] Where is it, David?

DAVID.

Would you mind? It must be on the dressing-table. [*GABRIELLE goes into the house.*] It's very good of you to have come. You'll find us a model couple.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I'm sorry for the man who wouldn't be happy with Gabrielle. . . . What a wonderful spot this is!

DAVID.

Yes—and quite out of the beaten track. Complete solitude and isolation.

[*There is something in his tone which makes MRS. MELLISSENT look curiously at him.*

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And have you always weather like this? It was bitterly cold in London—and foggy.

DAVID.

Here we have sunshine, day after day. But one hankers sometimes for a dear old London fog! [GABRIELLE *comes back and hands him his tobacco pouch.*] Thank you, dear.

GABRIELLE.

Shall I fill your pipe for you?

DAVID.

[*With a laugh.*] No, no—Mrs. Mellissent will think you are spoiling me! *Au revoir!*

[*He takes off his hat gaily and goes through the gate whistling.*

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Kissing GABRIELLE and pressing her to a seat by her side.*] Well?

GABRIELLE.

Tell me of yourself.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

My letters have told you all.

GABRIELLE.

So your scheme is a great success?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Wonderful! and you know I've turned my Kaffir into a company, which is always understood to be less enterprising than an individual.

GABRIELLE.

He hasn't been troublesome?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I put him in his place from the start, my dear, and he was too fat to jump! And you've no idea how delighted he is with the profits. And what do you think—I've just taken a *coupé*!

GABRIELLE.

Smiling.] No!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Fact. I have to go about a good deal, you see. I've a magnificent coachman, in bottle-green livery and a cockade—to which he's entitled, I believe, as he has a brother in the Volunteers. It does my heart good to hear them cry out "MRS. MELLISSENT'S CARRIAGE!" Oh—I've some news for you, by the way—

GABRIELLE.

What is it ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Mr. Molyneux. He's engaged.

GABRIELLE.

No !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And to be married as soon as the—er—decree is made absolute.

GABRIELLE.

Who is the victim—Heaven help her !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

H'm—she's an elderly woman, my dear, and enormously rich. She has buried three husbands already.

GABRIELLE.

Three ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Yes. A Jew, a Greek and a Scotchman. With such an education she ought to be able to tackle Mr. Molyneux without the interposition of Providence. They say he has lost all his money.

GABRIELLE.

Ah. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

And now tell me something.

GABRIELLE.

There's so little to tell. How long do you stay here, dear Alice?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Till my escort departs. I can't face that diligence all by myself.

GABRIELLE.

Oh Alice! He'll go to-day!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

I just wanted to have a peep in at you.

GABRIELLE.

Oh stay here a week at least!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Let me have a look at you, dear.

GABRIELLE.

[*Trying to smile.*] Well . . . ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

What is there that's strange in your face ?

GABRIELLE.

Strange ?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

In your face, in your voice, in your manner ?

GABRIELLE.

I'm a little excited, that's all. . . . Remember that yours is the first friendly face I've seen since . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Yes, of course. It's too far for most of your friends.

GABRIELLE.

My friends ! If I had any, do you think they would come to me ? It's that is so hard to bear. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

What ?

GABRIELLE.

The feeling that one is—outside. One or two people have passed through, but—

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Who were they ? .

GABRIELLE.

Women I had known—with their husbands.
They seem to have come on purpose—

MRS. MELLISSENT.

To see you?

GABRIELLE.

To cut me. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

The brutes!

GABRIELLE.

I still wear my ring, you see—David's, not his!
And the people here think we are married. . . . We
haven't the courage. . . . And you've no idea how the
ring burns!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

My poor Gabrielle!

GABRIELLE.

Isn't it strange? You reason it out to yourself—
you laugh at conventions—and you feel that your
cheeks are on fire when you talk to a girl in the
street! You have something to hide—always some-
thing to hide! And it isn't as though people would
care very much down here—they're not very moral.

And that makes it worse—it brings one down to their level.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

You'll get over all this very soon.

GABRIELLE.

Yes—but how? A painter came once—David knew him and asked him to call. And the second time he brought—the woman he lived with! Oh, my dear! He thought I was like her!

MRS. MELLISSENT.

What did you do?

GABRIELLE.

Sat it through. After all, am I so different?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

[*Stoutly.*] You're a woman whose husband was a blackguard and a scoundrel, and from whom you should have had a divorce, and not he from you! I'm not saying that you've done the right thing—but we're all weak—and I love and respect you.

GABRIELLE.

Love me, dear Alice—I hope that you always will love me. . . . But respect! You know all that's done with. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

So that's what I see in your face ?

GABRIELLE.

Yes. Fear !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Fear ?

GABRIELLE.

Fear of the present . . . of the past . . . of the future. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

But this is absurd ! What have you to fear ?

GABRIELLE.

I am never at peace. . . . There is never an hour when the brain is at rest—can simply enjoy, and not think. . . . Oh, he has been good to me ! . . . But, at times, in the evening, there comes a look over his face. . . . I'm alone on the sea, with him . . . and if he let me go—my God !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Why think of such awful, impossible things ?

GABRIELLE.

There is one subject between us, you see, that we never dare mention. But it *is* between us, always.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

She never has written ?

GABRIELLE.

No—not a word—oh, she's brave. . . . I'm afraid of this book, Alice. . . .

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Why ?

GABRIELLE.

Oh, I hope that I'm wrong—that I simply can't judge ! If Hopkinson liked it, admired it !

MRS. MELLISSENT.

What then ?

GABRIELLE.

It would break David's heart.

MRS. MELLISSENT.

My dear !

GABRIELLE.

Hopkinson is only a tradesman, you see, who sneers at art, and cares only for what will sell ; he despises everything that is above the head of the crowd. And he never makes a mistake. . . . It's being decided now—oh, God grant that I may be wrong !

[DAVID enters through the centre gate.

GABRIELLE.

[*Excitedly.*] David—well?

DAVID.

I've missed him! He had just started—he must have gone round by the river. Well—he'll be here soon enough! . . . How do you find Gabrielle looking, Mrs. Mellissent?

MRS. MELLISSENT.

Very well indeed. . . .

DAVID.

Isn't she? The place agrees with her. . . . What can have become of the man? Ah—behold—he arrives!

[*He walks to the gate on the right and leans over it.*

GABRIELLE.

[*To Mrs. MELLISSENT.*] Let us go in, dear—I am too nervous. . . .

[*GABRIELLE and MRS. MELLISSENT enter the house.*

DAVID.

[*Shouting to HOPKINSON, who is still invisible.*] Well, friend Hopkinson?

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Off, cheerily.*] I'm coming !

DAVID.

Have you read it ?

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Off.*] Oh yes—I've read it ! [DAVID starts slightly, frowns, walks to the table, and lights a cigarette. HOPKINSON comes in.] Good morning.

DAVID.

Good morning. Sleep well ?

MR. HOPKINSON.

Didn't sleep at all—reading all night. Now, first of all, and before I forget, here's a letter I was asked to bring.

[*He hands DAVID a letter, which the latter takes impatiently, and doubles up in his hand without looking at, his eyes fixed on HOPKINSON.*

DAVID.

Well—where's the MS. ?

MR. HOPKINSON.

In my bag. Have you a pen and ink?

[*He sits at table.*

DAVID.

What for?

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Draws out his cheque-book.*] I've brought a cheque.
How much do you want on account?

DAVID HOLLESDAILE.

[*Starting, and turning very pale.*] What . . .
you. . . .

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Rising, and speaking very solemnly.*] Sir, I congratulate you. This book will be the talk of London. It's a masterpiece. I print a first edition of 30,000 copies . . . thirty thousand copies. [DAVID *stares at him in blank amazement*; HOPKINSON becomes jovial and digs him in the ribs.] It ain't moral, you dog! It's corrupt, as corrupt as they make 'em! But there ain't no nonsense about it—no preaching, no blithering art! It'll shock the B. P., my boy, but I bet you my head it'll sell! [DAVID *remains silent and motionless*]

less, feverishly crumpling the letter in his hands.] Mudie's won't have it in their virtuous library—ha ! ha !—and Mr. Smith will refuse to let his innocent boys handle so wicked a book ! We don't mind—it saves the advertisements ! But the public will go for it—redheaded—there'll be a sensation—By the author of “The Poet's Dream.” Ha ! ha ! Oh you are a sly one !

DAVID.

[*Slowly.*] Is this—a joke ?

MR. HOPKINSON.

[*Roaring.*] A joke ? Where's Mrs. Molyneux—that is—er—yes—where is she ? I want to thank her. It's she's done this. I told her you were going to the dogs, with all that rot about art. She snubbed me, she did, but I guess that she's pulled us through ! I tell you this is a bit of all-right ! Now give me a pen and how much shall I say ? [*He flourishes his cheque-book and looks smilingly at DAVID.*]

DAVID.

How much ?

MR. HOPKINSON.

Name your own figure !

DAVID.

[Walks slowly to him, seizes the cheque-book, and throws it in HOPKINSON's face.] Go !

MR. HOPKINSON.

[Rising in absolute bewilderment.] Eh ?

DAVID.

Go—and return the manuscript.

MR. HOPKINSON.

My dear chap—are you daft ?

DAVID.

[With a sudden access of mad passion, shakes HOPKINSON till his teeth rattle.] Beast ! Pig ! Ass ! Will you go ?

[HOPKINSON yells. GABRIELLE comes rushing from the house.

GABRIELLE.

David ! [At the sound of her voice DAVID releases HOPKINSON, and stares blankly at GABRIELLE.] Why—what—

MR. HOPKINSON.

[Picking up his cheque-book and arranging his collar.] Because I told him what I thought of his book !

GABRIELLE.

Oh! You like it!

MR. HOPKINSON

Like it! I—

GABRIELLE.

Hush! Go now, *please*. . . .

MR. HOPKINSON.

But—

GABRIELLE.

I beg of you. . . . [She plucks him by the sleeve and leads him to the gate, talking to him in whispers; HOPKINSON goes. She returns to DAVID, who has let himself fall into a chair, and has buried his head in his hands. She looks anxiously at him, and lays her cheek against his; he shivers and raises his head. David. . . .

DAVID.

Corrupt . . . immoral—the sort of thing that will sell! And I who thought I was doing such great, noble work!

GABRIELLE.

Oh David, he may be wrong. . . .

DAVID.

He isn't—you know that he isn't! The terrible thing is that I didn't know it—that I was so blinded! What has come over me? What does this mean? *You* felt it!

GABRIELLE.

I. . . .

DAVID.

You felt it, you knew it! . . . I re-wrote the first part; I altered it all . . . because *I* was no longer the same. What is it has changed in me? . . . [He turns from GABRIELLE and speaks as though to himself.] Can it be that these simple, humble, old-fashioned moralities revenge themselves on us, so soon as we pass them by? These elementary duties of life, can they be so important that we must choose between them and the kennel?

GABRIELLE.

David!

DAVID.

[Turning to her and taking her hand.] Forgive me, forgive me, I scarcely know what I am saying. . . . But you cannot conceive what hopes *I* had formed. . . .

GABRIELLE.

You will realise them yet, you will, you will! I have no fears or doubts.

DAVID.

. . . Whatever we do in our lives, I suppose we unconsciously try to persuade ourselves we have done right. . . . And perhaps that is why, in this book—
[He pauses abruptly.] We must burn it.

GABRIELLE.

Burn it—yes, yes. . . . And begin all over again! Your next will be very different. You will still do what you intended!

DAVID.

[Sadly.] Never. I am finished.

GABRIELLE.

David!

DAVID.

Don't you see? I am as the book is. If that is corrupt and immoral, then so am I too. . . . It is strange that the only times I guessed at the truth were the times when—[He stops.]

GABRIELLE.

Say it—say it! When you thought of your wife and your children!

DAVID.

[*In a low voice.*] Yes. . . . [GABRIELLE sinks her head. *There is a moment's silence.*] I have been a vain and impious fool. I put my work high above all, I fell down and worshipped it. I imagined that what I had to say was worth any sacrifice. And see the result!

GABRIELLE.

You blame me, I see. . . .

DAVID.

You—why you? It was I dragged you away, who forced you to go with me—

GABRIELLE.

Yes, yes, remember that always!

DAVID.

You told me that you did not love me—

GABRIELLE.

Not then—or at least not consciously—for I must always have loved you. . . . And little by little this

love has been growing within me, till it has become so great, so noble and true, that it almost atones for the past—yes, atones for it! Rest on this love of mine—build on it; let it give you strength and hope—and when your heart fails you, come . . . and look into mine! [DAVID *sighs heavily, but says nothing.*] And all that has happened we two will forget, and together build up the future.

DAVID.

There is no future for me. I am ended. I have lost my faith in myself.

GABRIELLE.

No, no!

DAVID.

Let us not shrink from the truth. . . . It is I who have done all this—I who have dragged you down with me—and here we stand now, on the brink, shivering, trembling, regretting. . . .

GABRIELLE.

Not regretting, David! Not that!

DAVID.

Ah Gabrielle, let us say nothing more, let us say nothing more! . . . [He rises.] Where is Mrs. Mellis-sent?

GABRIELLE.

Inside—writing a letter.

DAVID.

Would she go to the inn, do you think, and see him, and bring back the book?

GABRIELLE.

Yes, yes—I'll tell her—at once—

[She goes quickly into the house; DAVID paces to and fro; he suddenly notices the letter he has unconsciously been holding in his hand, and glances at it.]

DAVID.

From Clara! Clara! . . . To-day! . . . Ah, Hopkinson brought it. . . . *[He looks furtively around, opens the letter, casts his eye over it, and lets his hand fall.]* Return! . . . Forgive—for the sake of the children. . . . return . . . return!

[He sinks into a chair, still clutching the letter.]

GABRIELLE comes back from the house; she has evidently nerved herself; as she approaches DAVID her step is more buoyant, her voice clear and ringing.

GABRIELLE.

She has gone, dear. . . . And we must be careful not to let her see. . . . And you won't let this cast you down—you'll begin working again to-morrow. [DAVID looks strangely at her, but says nothing.] We are not cut off from mankind, you and I, because a few people condemn us ! We've hidden away up till now—we've been wrong. We've said we were married—we won't any more. We'll live our lives proudly, henceforth—there's much we can do—and you, oh my dearest, you will still write the book that you dreamed of. [DAVID remains silent, the strange look on his face deepening. He unconsciously twists the letter backwards and forwards.] What is that letter ?

DAVID.

. . . The letter ?

GABRIELLE.

David, David, what is that letter ?

DAVID.

. . . Hopkinson brought it. . . .

GABRIELLE.

[With a violent start.] From—her ? [DAVID nods.] Give it to me. . . . [He makes a movement as though

to withhold it ; she snatches it from him, almost fiercely, and reads it.] Return ! [She looks at DAVID ; he bends his eyes guiltily on the ground.] Oh, my God ! . . . David ! Speak to me !

DAVID.

[*Dully, without looking up.*] . . . I shall not answer her letter.

GABRIELLE.

[*Wildly.*] Not answer, not answer—but you—you— [She bends over him ; he gives no sign.] Tell me that you did not think—or wish—for one instant—

[DAVID rises, almost pushing her from him, takes the letter, and slowly tears it in two.

DAVID.

[*With suppressed passion.*] There lies the letter—destroyed—like my life—like hers—like yours.

GABRIELLE.

Destroyed—no, no !

[*She goes to him with outstretched arms ; he recoils from her.*

DAVID.

Don't touch me. . . . Oh, I could say things to you to-day. . . .

GABRIELLE.

To me—to me. Oh, David, you mustn't be cruel—

DAVID.

Cruel, yes—cruel. . . . Go in, go in—don't speak to me now. . . .

GABRIELLE.

I know what a terrible blow the book has been—

DAVID.

The book—I've forgotten the book! I only remember—you!

GABRIELLE.

I don't know what you mean. . . .

DAVID.

Go into the house, I tell you! Don't stand there and mock me!

GABRIELLE.

[*In terror.*] David!

DAVID.

The truth, the truth ! I see myself now—I am what you've made me ! Are you satisfied ? I'm broken and done for—but I'm yours, I belong to you !

GABRIELLE.

Have you forgotten what you said just now—that it wasn't my fault—that you forced me to go with you ?

DAVID.

I forced you, I forced you ! . Was it I who, right from the first time I saw you, played the devil's game with your soul ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Her knees bending beneath her.*] David !

DAVID.

Was it I who compelled you to come to me, day after day, and see me, always alone ? I who cajoled you, and smiled on you, and tricked away heart and brain ?

GABRIELLE.

[*Her hands on her heart.*] These things to me. . . .

DAVID.

To you, to you ! When I met you, I was at peace, doing my work and my duty—you coiled yourself round me, with your beautiful face—you stole between me and my wife.

GABRIELLE.

My God ! . . . We only were friends !

DAVID.

Friends ! We never were friends—you know that ! Friendship didn't content you—you wanted my soul. I tried to escape, more than once, but you wouldn't allow it ! You had only to smile on me, look at me—back I crawled to my place ! You were idle and vain—and you needed a plaything—there was I—David Hollesdaile !

GABRIELLE.

Do you . . . mean . . . these . . . things . . . you are saying ?

DAVID.

I have thought them again and again—they always are with me ! I was weak, I was weak, but it was you who lured and enticed me away from my duty, my wife, and all that was good in me ! And here I am now—what you've made me !

GABRIELLE.

[*Overwhelmed.*] I'll go in—I'll lie down——

DAVID.

[*Harshly.*] Stay here! [For an instant they stand face to face, looking into each other's eyes.] Reparation! Why not?

GABRIELLE.

[*Dully.*] Reparation?

DAVID.

She asks me to return.

GABRIELLE.

[*Almost in a shriek.*] David!

DAVID.

Why should I not go?

GABRIELLE.

Why—why!

DAVID.

Why should I not go? Is it possible, now, for us two? Come, come, let us think! All our life, all

these years, of despair. Let us face it ! I shan't touch a pen any more. But I can at least——

[*GABRIELLE, who has seemed almost dazed, suddenly screams, and falls on her knees before him.*]

GABRIELLE.

On my knees, on my knees ! You don't mean this—say you don't mean it ! [*DAVID turns from her, unmoved ; she follows him on her knees.*] Look at me, look at me ! I am weak, I am helpless ! And there is something besides, but don't force me to tell you now ! Not now ! Say that you love me ! All this isn't real, it can't be ! See, I'm on my knees, and I used to be proud. . . . I forgive you for all you have said—but swear that you never will leave me—swear it, dear David, swear it !

DAVID.

I will go back.

GABRIELLE.

[*Staggering to her feet.*] And leave me ?

DAVID.

Yes.

GABRIELLE.

You can't, you can't !

DAVID.

I'll go back. I'll do everything for you ; but there lies my duty—I go.

GABRIELLE.

[*In a hard, dull voice, speaking as though something had suddenly snapped within her.*] And will you leave—your child ?

DAVID.

What ? What ? You. . . .

GABRIELLE.

Yes. Will you leave your child ?

DAVID.

[*His voice and bearing completely changed.*] Forgive what I said—forgive—I was mad—

[*He makes a movement towards her, but she waves him back ; she stands rigid, her eyes uplifted.*]

GABRIELLE.

O God, O God, have mercy on us both !

CURTAIN.

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